THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY 1982
$1.50
IN CANADA $1.75

ELLERY QUEEN®

Julian Symons
Edward D. Hoch
Patricia Moyes
Seicho Matsumoto
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Donald E. Westlake
Thomas Walsh
Simon Brett

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JULIAN SYMONS

first publication in the United States

Oliver Glass's sights were set on the Perfect Crime. The elements were there. Elizabeth. Deliciously unpredictable Evelyn. And above all the indispensable Eustace . . .

THE FLAW

by JULIAN SYMONS

"Drink your coffee."

Celia sat feet up on the sofa, reading a fashion magazine, the coffee cup on the table beside her. "What's that?"

"I said drink your coffee. You know you like it to be piping hot."

She contemplated the coffee, stirred it with a spoon, then put the spoon back in the saucer. "I'm not sure it's hot enough now."

"I poured it only a couple of minutes ago."

"Yes, but still. I don't know that I feel like coffee tonight. But I do want a brandy." She swung her legs off the sofa and went across to the drinks tray. "A celebratory brandy. Can I pour one for you?"

"What are we celebrating?"

"Me, Giles, not you. I'm celebrating. But you want me to drink my coffee, don't you? All right." She went swiftly back, lifted the coffee cup, drank the contents in two gulps, and made a face. "Not very hot. Now may I have my brandy?"

"Of course. Let me pour it for you."

"Oh, no, I'll do it myself. After all, you poured the coffee." She smiled sweetly.

"What do you mean?"

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"Just that we've both had coffee. And you poured it. But I gave it to you on the tray, remember?"

Sir Giles got up, put a hand to his throat. "What are you trying to say?"

"Only that if I turned the tray around you'll have got my cup and I shall have got yours. But it wouldn't matter. Or would it?"

He made for the door and turned the handle, but it did not open. "It's locked. What have you done with the key?"

"I can't imagine." As he lumbered towards her, swaying a little, she easily evaded him. "You think I'm a fool, Giles, don't you? I'm not, that's your mistake. So this is a celebration."

"Celia." His hand was at his throat again. He choked, collapsed onto the carpet, and lay still.

Celia looked at him thoughtfully, finished her brandy, prodded him with her foot, and said, "Now, what to do about the body?"

The curtain came down. The first act of *Villain* was over.

"I enjoyed it enormously," Duncan George said. "Is it all right if I smoke?"

"Of course." Oliver Glass was busy at the dressing-table, removing the makeup that had turned him into Sir Giles. In the glass he saw Dunc packing his pipe and lighting it. Good old Dunc, he thought, reliable dull old Dunc, his reactions are always predictable. "Pour yourself a drink."

"Not coffee, I hope." Oliver's laugh was perfunctory. "I thought the play was really clever. All those twists and turns in the plot. And you enjoy being the chief actor as well as the writer, don't you, it gives you an extra kick?"

"My dear fellow, you're a psychologist as well as a crime writer yourself, you should know. But, after all, who can interpret one's own writing better than oneself? The play—well, between these four walls it's a collection of tricks. The supreme trick is to make the audience accept it, to deceive them not once or twice but half a dozen times, to make them leave the theatre gasping at the cleverness of it all. And if that's to be done, Sir Giles has to be played on just the right note, so that we're never quite certain whether he's fooling everybody else or being fooled himself, never quite sure whether he's the villain or the hero. And who knows that better than the author? So if he happens to be an actor too, he must be perfect for the part."

"Excellent special pleading. I'll tell you one thing, though. When

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the curtain comes down at the end of the first act, nobody really believes you're dead. Oliver Glass is the star, and if you're dead they've been cheated. So they're just waiting for you to come out of that cupboard."

"But think of the tension that's building while they wait. Ready, Dunc."

He clapped the other on the shoulder, and they walked out into the London night. Oliver Glass was a slim, elegant man in his fifties, successful both as actor and dramatist, so successful that he could afford to laugh at the critic who said that he had perfected the art of overacting, and the other critic who remarked that after seeing an Oliver Glass play he was always reminded of the line that said life was mostly froth and bubble. Whether Oliver did laugh was another matter, for he disliked any adverse view of his abilities. He had a flat in the heart of the West End, a small house in Sussex and a beautiful wife named Elizabeth who was fifteen years his junior.

Duncan George looked insignificant by his side. He was short and square, a practising psychiatrist who also wrote crime stories, and he had known Oliver for some years. He was typified for Oliver by the abbreviation of his first name, Dunc. He was exactly the kind of person Oliver could imagine dunking a doughnut into a cup of coffee or doing something equally vulgar. With all that, however, Duncan was a good fellow, and Oliver tolerated him as a companion.

They made their way through the West End to a street off Leicester Square where the Criminologists' Club met once a quarter to eat a late supper followed by a talk on a subject of criminal interest. The members were all writers about real or fictitious crime, and on this evening Oliver Glass was to speak to them on "The Romance of Crime," with Duncan George as his chairman. When he rose and looked around, with that gracious look in which there was just a touch of contempt, the buzz of conversation ceased.

"Gentlemen," he began, "criminologists—fellow crime writers—perhaps fellow criminals. I have come tonight to plead for romance in the world of crime, for the locked-room murder, the impossible theft, the crime committed by the invisible man. I have come to plead that you should bring wit and style and complexity to your writings about crime, that you should remember Stevenson's view that life is a bazaar of dangerous and smiling chances, and the remark of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright when he confessed to poisoning his pretty sister-in-law: 'It was a terrible thing to do, but she

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had thick ankles.' I beseech you not to forget those thick ankles as a motive, and to abandon the dreary books some of you write concerned with examining the psychology of two equally dull people to decide which destroyed the other, or looking at bits of intestines under a microscope to determine whether a tedious husband killed his boring wife. Your sights should be set instead on the Perfect Crime . . ."

Oliver Glass spoke, as always, without notes, fluently and with style, admiring the fluency and stylishness as the words issued from his mouth. Afterwards he was challenged by some members, Duncan George among them, about that conjectural Perfect Crime. Wasn't it out of date? Not at all, Oliver said, Sir Giles in *Villain* attempted it.

"Yes, but, as you remarked yourself, *Villain*'s a mass of clever tricks," Dunc said. "Sir Giles wants to kill Celia as a kind of trick, just to prove that he can get away with it. Or at least we think he does. Then you play all sorts of variations on the idea—is the poison really a sleeping draught? does she know about it?—that kind of thing. Splendid to watch, but nobody would actually try it. In every perfect murder, so called, there is actually a flaw." There was a chorus of agreement, by which Oliver found himself a little irritated.

"How do you know that? The Perfect Crime is one in which the criminal never puts himself within reach of the law. Perhaps, even, no crime is known to have taken place, although that is a little short of perfection. But how do we know, gentlemen, what variations on the Perfect Crime any of us may be planning, may even have carried out? 'The desires of the heart are as crooked as corkscrews,' as the poet says, and I'm sure Dunc can bear that out from his psychiatric experience."

"Any of us is capable of violence under certain circumstances, if that's what you mean. But to set out to commit a Perfect Crime without a motive is the mark of a psychopath."

"I didn't say without motive. A good motive for one man may be trivial to another."

"Tell us when you're going to commit the Perfect Crime, and we'll see if we can solve it," somebody said. There was a murmur of laughter.

Upon this note Oliver left, and strolled home to Everley Court, passing the drunks on the pavements, the blacks and yellows and all conditions of foreigners, who jostled each other or stood gaping outside the sex cinemas. He made a slight detour to pass by the

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theatre, and saw with a customary glow of pleasure the poster: *Oliver Glass in* Villain. *The Mystery Play by Oliver Glass.*

Was he really planning the Perfect Crime? There can be no doubt, he said to himself, that the idea is in your mind. And the elements are there—Elizabeth, and deliciously unpredictable Evelyn, and above all the indispensable Eustace. But is it more than a whim? Do I really dislike Elizabeth enough? The answer to that, of course, was that it was not a question of hatred but of playing a game, the game of Oliver Glass versus Society, even Oliver Glass versus the World.

And so home. And to Elizabeth.

A nod to Tyler, the night porter at the block of flats. Up in the lift to the third floor. Key in the door.

From the entrance hall the apartment stretched left and right. To the left Elizabeth's bedroom and bathroom. Almost directly in front of him the living room, further to the right dining room and kitchen, at the extreme right Oliver's bedroom and bathroom. He went into the living room, switched on the light. On the mantelpiece there was a note in Elizabeth's scrawl: *O. Please come to see me if back before 2* A.M. *E.*

For two years now they had communicated largely by means of such notes. It had begun—how had it begun?—because she was so infuriatingly talkative when he wanted to concentrate. "I am an artist," he had said. "The artist needs isolation if the fruits of genius are to ripen on the bough of inspiration." The time had been when Elizabeth listened open-eyed to such words, but those days had gone. For a long while now she had made comments suggesting that his qualities as actor and writer fell short of genius, or had pointed out that last night he had happily stayed late at a party. She did not understand the artistic temperament. Her nagging criticism had become, quite simply, a bore.

There was, he admitted as he turned the note in his fingers, something else. There were the girls needed by the artist as part of his inspiration, the human clay turned by him into something better. Elizabeth had never understood about them, and in particular had failed to understand when she had returned to find one of them with him on the living room carpet. She had spoken of divorce, but he knew the words to be idle. Elizabeth had extravagant tastes, and divorce would hardly allow her to indulge them. So the notes developed. They lived separate lives, with occasional evenings when she acted as hostess, or came in and chatted amiably enough to

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friends. For the most part the arrangement suited him rather well, although just at present his absorption with Evelyn was such . . .

He went in to see Elizabeth.

She was sitting on a small sofa, reading. Although he valued youth above all things, he conceded, as he looked appraisingly at her, that she was still attractive. Her figure was slim (no children, he could not have endured the messy, noisy things), legs elegant, dainty feet. She had kept her figure, as—he confirmed, looking at himself in the glass—he had kept his. How curious that he no longer found her desirable.

"Oliver." He turned. "Stop looking at yourself."

"Was I doing that?"

"You know you were. Stop acting."

"But I am an actor."

"Acting off stage, I mean. You don't know anybody exists outside yourself."

"There is a respectable philosophical theory maintaining that very proposition. I have invented you, you have invented me. A charming idea."

"A very silly idea. Oliver, why don't you divorce me?"

"Have you given me cause?"

"You know how easily it can be arranged."

He answered with a world-weary sigh. She exclaimed angrily and he gave her a look of pure dislike, so that she exclaimed again.

"You *do* dislike me, don't you? A touch of genuine feeling. So why not?" She went over to her dressing-table, sat down, took out a pot of cream.

He placed a hand on his heart. "I was—"

"I know. You were born a Catholic. But when did you last go to church?"

"Very well. Say simply that I don't care to divorce you. It would be too vulgar."

"You've got a new girl. I can always tell."

"Is there anything more tedious than feminine intuition?"

"Let me tell you something. This time I shall have you followed. And *I* shall divorce *you*. What do you think of that?"

"Very little." And indeed, who would pay her charge account at Harrods, provide the jewelry she loved? Above all, where would she get the money she gambled away at casinos and the races? She had made similar threats before, and he knew them to be empty ones.

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"You want me as a kind of butterfly you've stuck with a pin, nothing more."

She was at work with the cream. She used one cream on her face, another on her neck, a third on her legs. Then she covered her face with a black mask, which was supposed to increase the effectiveness of the cream. She often kept this mask on all night.

There had been a time when he found it exciting to make love to a woman whose face was not visible, but in her case that time had gone long ago. What was she saying now?

"Nothing gets through to you, does it? You have a sort of armour of conceit. But you have the right name, do you know that? Glass—if one could see through you there would be nothing, absolutely nothing there. Oliver Glass, *you don't exist.*"

Very well, he thought, very well, I am an invisible man. I accept the challenge. Elizabeth, you have signed your death warrant.

The idea, then, was settled. Plans had to be made. But they were still uncertain, moving around in what he knew to be his marvelously ingenious mind, when he went to visit Evelyn after lunch on the following day. Evelyn was in her early twenties, young enough—oh, yes, he acknowledged it—to be his daughter, young enough also to be pleased by the company of a famous actor. But beyond that, Evelyn fascinated him by her unpredictability. She was a photographer's model much in demand, and he did not doubt that she had other lovers. There were times when she said that she was too busy to see him, or simply that she wanted to be alone, and he accepted these refusals as part of the excitement of the chase. There was a perversity about Evelyn, an abandonment to the whim of the moment, that reached out to something in his own nature. He felt sometimes that there was no suggestion so outrageous that she would refuse to consider it. She had once opened the door of her flat naked and asked him to strip and accompany her down to the street.

Her flat was off Baker Street, and when he rang the bell there was no reply. At the third ring he felt annoyance. He had telephoned in advance, as always, and she had said she would be there. He pushed the door in a tentative way, and it swung open. In the hall he called her name. There was no reply.

The flat was not large. He went into the living room, which was untidy as usual, glanced into the small kitchen, then went into the

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bedroom with its unmade bed. What had happened to her, where was she? He entered the bathroom, and recoiled from what he saw.

Evelyn lay face down, half in and half out of the bath. One arm hung over the side of the bath, the other trailed in the water. Her head rested on the side of the bath as though her neck was broken.

He went across to her, touched the arm outside the bath. It was warm. He bent down to feel the pulse. As he did so the arm moved, the body turned, and Evelyn was laughing at him.

"You frightened me. You bitch." But he was excited, not angry.

"The author of *Villain* should be used to tricks." She got out, handed him a towel. "Dry me."

Their lovemaking afterwards had the frantic, paroxysmic quality that he had found in few women. It was as though he were bringing her back from the dead. A thought struck him. "Have you done that with anybody else?"

"Does it matter?"

"Perhaps not. I should still like to know."

"Nobody else."

"It was as though you were anther person."

"Good. I'd like to be a different person every time."

He was following his own train of thought. "My wife puts on a black mask after creaming her face at night. That should be exciting, but it isn't."

Evelyn was insatiably curious about the details of sex, and he had told her a good deal about Elizabeth.

"I'm good for you," she said now. "You get a kick each time, don't you?"

"Yes. And you?"

She considered this. She had a similar figure to Elizabeth's but her features were very different, the nose snub instead of aquiline, the eyes blue and wide apart. "In a way. Being who you are gives me a kick."

"Is that all?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you like me?"

"It's wet to ask things like that. I never thought you were wet." She looked at him directly with her large, slightly vacant blue eyes. "If you want to know, I get a kick out of you because you're acting all the time. It's the acting you like, not the act. And then I get a kick out of you being an old man."

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He was so angry that he slapped her face. She said calmly, "Yes, I like that too."

By the time that night's performance was over his plan was made.

In the next two weeks Tyler, the night porter at Everley Court, was approached three times by a tall bulky man wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. The man asked for Mrs. Glass and seemed upset to learn on every occasion that she was out. Once he handed a note to Tyler and then took it back, saying it wouldn't do to leave a letter lying around. Twice he left messages to say that Charles had called and wanted to talk to Mrs. Glass. On his third visit the man smelled of drink and his manner was belligerent. "You tell her I must talk to her," he said in an accent that Tyler could not place, except that the man definitely came from somewhere up north.

"Yes, sir. And the name is—?"

"Charles. She'll know."

Tyler coughed. "Begging your pardon, sir, but wouldn't it be better to telephone?"

The man glared at him. "Do you think I haven't tried? You tell her to get in touch. If she doesn't I won't answer for the consequences."

"Charles?" Elizabeth said when Tyler rather hesitantly told her this. "I know two or three people named Charles, but this doesn't seem to fit any of them. What sort of age?"

"Perhaps about forty, Mrs. Glass. Smartly dressed. A gentleman. Comes from the north, maybe Scotland, if that's any help."

"No doubt it should be, but it isn't."

"He seemed—" Tyler hesitated. "Very concerned."

On the following day Oliver left a note for her. *E. Man rang while you were out, wouldn't leave message. O.* She questioned him about the call.

"He wouldn't say what he wanted. Just rang off when I said you weren't here."

"It must be the same man." She explained about him. "Tyler said he had a northern accent, probably Scottish."

"What Scots do you know named Charles?"

"Charles Rothsey, but I haven't seen him for years. I wish he'd ring when I'm here."

A couple of evenings later the wish was granted, although she did not speak to the man. Oliver had asked her to give a little supper party after the show for three members of the cast, and because two

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of them were women Duncan was invited to even up the numbers. Elizabeth was serving the cold salmon when the telephone rang in the living room. Oliver went to answer it. He came back almost at once, looking thoughtful. When Elizabeth said it had been a quick call, he looked sharply at her. "It was your friend Charles. He rang off. Just announced himself, then rang off when he heard my voice."

"Who's Charles?" one of the women asked. "He sounds interesting."

"You'd better ask Elizabeth."

She told the story of the man who had called, and it caused general amusement. Only Oliver remained serious. When the guests were going he asked Duncan to stay behind.

"I just wanted your opinion, Dunc. This man has called three times and now he's telephoning. What sort of man would do this kind of thing, and what can we do about it?"

"What sort of man? Hard to say." Duncan took out his pipe, filled and lit it with maddening deliberation. "Could be a practical joker, harmless enough. Or it could be somebody—well, not so harmless. But I don't see that you can do much about it. Obscene and threatening phone calls are ten a penny, as the police will tell you. Of course, if he does show up again Elizabeth could see him, but I'd recommend having somebody else here."

This was, Oliver considered, adequate preparation of the ground. It had been established that Elizabeth was being pursued by a character named Charles. There was no doubt about Charles's existence. He obviously existed independently of Oliver Glass, since Tyler had seen him and Oliver himself had spoken to him on the telephone. If Elizabeth was killed, the mysterious Charles would be the first suspect.

Charles had been created as somebody separate from Oliver by that simplicity which is the essence of all fine art. Oliver, like Sir Giles in *Villain*, was a master of disguise. He had in particular the ability possessed by the great Vidocq, of varying his height by twelve inches or more. Charles had been devised from a variety of props, like cheek pads, body cushions, and false eyebrows, plus the indispensable platform heels. He would make one more appearance and then vanish from the scene. He would never have to meet anybody who knew Oliver well, something which he slightly regretted. And Charles on the telephone had been an actor whom Oliver had asked to ring during the evening. Oliver had merely said he couldn't talk now but would call him tomorrow and then put down the receiver.

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In the next few days he noticed with amusement tinged with annoyance that Elizabeth had fulfilled her threat of putting a private inquiry agent on his track. He spotted the man hailing a taxi just after he had got one himself, and then getting out a few yards behind him when he stopped outside Evelyn's flat. Later he pointed out the man, standing in a doorway opposite to Evelyn. She giggled, and suggested that they should ask him up.

"I believe you would," he said admiringly. "Is there anything you wouldn't do?"

"If I felt like it, nothing." She was high on some drug or other. "What about you?"

"A lot of things."

"*Careful* old Oliver." What would she say if she knew what he was planning? He was tempted to say something, but resisted, although so far as he could tell nothing would shock her. She suddenly threw up the window, leaned out, and gave a piercing whistle. When the man looked up, she beckoned. He turned his head and then began to walk away. Oliver was angry, but what was the use of saying anything? It was her recklessness that fascinated him.

His annoyance was reflected in a note left for Elizabeth. *E. This kind of spying is degrading. O.* He found a reply that night when he came back from the theatre. *O. Your conduct is degrading. Your present fancy is public property. E.*

That Oliver Glass had charm was acknowledged even by those not susceptible to it. In the days after the call from Charles, he exerted this charm upon Elizabeth. She went out a good deal in the afternoons, where or with whom he really didn't care, and this gave him the chance to leave little notes. One of them ran: *E. You simply MUST be waiting here for me after the theatre. I have a small surprise for you. O.* And another: *E. Would supper at Wheeler's amuse you this evening? Remembrance of things past . . . O.* On the first occasion, he gave her a pretty ruby ring set with pearls, and the reference in the second note was to the fact that they had often eaten at Wheeler's in the early months after marriage. On these evenings he set out to dazzle and amuse her as he had done in the past, and she responded. Perhaps the response was unwilling, but that no doubt was because of Evelyn. He noticed, however, that the man following him was no longer to be seen, and at their Wheeler's supper mentioned this to her.

"I know who she is. I know you've always been like that. Perhaps

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I have to accept it." Her eyes flashed. "Although if I want to get divorce evidence it won't be difficult."

"An artist needs more than one woman," Oliver said. "But you must not think that I can do without you. I need you. You are a fixed point in a shifting world."

What nonsense I do talk, he said to himself indulgently. The truth was that contact with her nowadays was distasteful to him. By the side of Evelyn she was insipid. A great actor, however, can play any part, and this one would not be maintained for long.

Only one faintly disconcerting thing happened in this, as he thought of it, second-honeymoon period. He came back to the flat unexpectedly early one afternoon and heard Elizabeth's voice on the telephone. She replaced the receiver as he entered the room. Her face was flushed. When he asked who she had been speaking to, she said, "Charles."

"Charles?" For a moment he couldn't think who she was talking about. Then he stared at her. Nobody knew better than he that she could not have been speaking to Charles, but of course he couldn't say that.

"What did he say?"

"Beastly things. I put down the receiver."

Why was she lying? How absurd, how deliciously absurd, if she had a lover. Or was it possible that somebody at the supper party was playing a practical joke? He brushed aside such conjectures because they didn't matter now. Nothing could interfere with the enactment of the supreme drama of his life.

Celia's intention in *Villain* was to explain Sir Giles's absence by saying that he had gone away on a trip, something he did from time to time. Hence the remark about disposition of the body at the end of Act One. Just after the beginning of the second act the body was revealed by Celia to her lover shoved into a cupboard, a shape hidden in a sack. A few minutes later, the cupboard was opened again and the shape was seen by the audience, although not by Celia, to move slightly. Then, after twenty-five minutes of the second act, there was a brief blackout on stage. When the lights went up, Sir Giles emerged from the cupboard, not dead but drugged.

To be enclosed within a sack for that length of time is no pleasure, and in any ordinary theatrical company the body in the sack would have been that of the understudy, with the leading man changing over only a couple of minutes before he was due to emerge from the

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cupboard. But Oliver believed in what he called the theatre of the actual. In another play he had insisted that the voice of an actress shut up for some time in a trunk must be real and not a recording, so that the actress herself had to be in the trunk. In *Villain* he maintained that the experience of being actually in the sack was emotionally valuable, so that he always stayed in it for the whole length of time it was in the cupboard.

The body in the sack was to provide Oliver with an unbreakable alibi. The interval after Act One lasted fifteen minutes, so that he had nearly forty minutes free. Everley Court was seven minutes' walk from the theatre, and he did not expect to need much more than twenty minutes all told. The body in the sack would be seen to twitch by hundreds of people, and who could be in it but Oliver?

In fact, Useful Eustace would be the sack's occupant. Eustace was a dummy used by stage magicians who wanted to achieve very much the effect at which Oliver aimed, of persuading an audience that there was a human being inside a container. He was made of plastic and inflated to the size of a small man. You then switched on a mechanism which made Eustace kick out arms and legs in a galvanic manner. A battery-operated timer in his back could be set to operate at intervals ranging from thirty seconds to five minutes. When deflated, Eustace folded up neatly into a size no larger than a plastic raincoat.

Eustace was the perfect accomplice, Useful Eustace indeed. Oliver had tried him out half a dozen times inside a sack of similar size and he looked most convincing.

On the afternoon of The Day he rested. Elizabeth was out, but said that she would be back before seven. His carefully worded note was left on her mantelpiece. *E. I want you at the flat ALL this evening. A truly sensational surprise for you. All the evening, mind, not just after the show. O.* Her curiosity would not, he felt sure, be able to resist such a note.

During Act One he admired, with the detachment of the artist, his own performance. He was cynical, ironic, dramatic—in a word, superb. When it was over he went unobtrusively to his dressing room. He had no fear of visitors, for he was known to detest any interruption during the interval.

And now came what in advance he felt to be the only ticklish part of the operation. The cupboard with the sack in it opened onto the back of the stage. The danger of carrying out an inflated Eustace from dressing room to stage was too great—he must be inflated on

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site, as it were, and it was possible, although unlikely, that a wandering stagehand might see him at work. The Perfect Crime does not depend upon chance or upon the taking of risks, and if the worst happened, if he was seen obviously inflating a dummy, the project must be abandoned for the present time. But fortune favours the creative artist, or did so on this occasion. Inflation of Eustace by pump took only a few moments as he knelt by the cupboard, and nobody came near. The timer had been set for movement every thirty seconds. He put Eustace into the sack, waited to see him twitch, closed the cupboard's false back, and strolled away.

He left the theatre by an unobtrusive exit used by those who wanted to avoid the autograph hunters outside the stage door, and walked along head down until he reached the nearest Underground station, one of the few in London equipped with lockers and lavatories. Unhurriedly, he took Charles's clothes and shoes from the locker, went into a lavatory, changed, put his acting clothes back in the locker. Spectacles and revolver were in his jacket pocket. He had bought the revolver years ago when he had been playing a part in which he was supposed to be an expert shot. By practice in a shooting range he had, in fact, become a quite reasonable one.

As he left the station he looked at his watch. Six minutes. Very good.

Charles put on a pair of grey gloves from another jacket pocket. Three minutes brought him to Everley Court. He walked straight across to the lift, something he could not do without being observed by Tyler. The man came over, and in Charles's husky voice, with its distinctive accent, he said: "Going up to Mrs. Glass. Expecting me."

"I'll ring, sir. It's Mr. Charles, isn't it?"

"No need. I said, she's expecting me."

Perfectly, admirably calm. But in the lift he felt, quite suddenly, that he would be unable to do it. To allow Elizabeth to divorce him and then to marry or live with Evelyn until they tired of each other—wouldn't that, after all, be the sensible, obvious thing? But to be *sensible*, to be *obvious*—were such things worthy of Oliver Glass? Wasn't the whole point that by this death, which in a practical sense was needless, he would show the character of a great artist and a great actor, a truly superior man?

The lift stopped. He got out. The door confronted him. Put key in lock, turn. Enter.

The flat was in darkness, no light in the hall. No sound. "Eliza-

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beth," he called in a voice that did not seem his own. He had difficulty in not turning and leaving the flat.

He opened the door of the living room. This also was in darkness. Was Elizabeth not there after all, had she ignored his note or failed to return? He felt a wave of relief at the thought, but still there was the bedroom. He must look in the bedroom.

The door was open—a glimmer of light showed within. He did not remember taking the revolver from his pocket, but it was in his gloved hand.

He took two steps into the room. Her dimmed bedside light was switched on. She lay on the bed naked, the black mask over her face. He called out something and she sat up, stretched out arms to him. His reaction was one of disgust and horror. He was not conscious of squeezing the trigger, but the revolver in his hand spoke three times.

She did not call out but gave a kind of gasp. A patch of darkness showed between her breasts. She sank back on the bed.

With the action taken, certainty returned to him. Everything he did now was efficient, exact. He got into the lift, took it down to the basement, and walked out through the garage there, meeting nobody. Tyler would be able to say when Mr. Charles had arrived, but not when he left.

Back to the Underground lavatory, clothes changed, Charles's clothing and revolver returned to the locker for later disposal, locker key put in handkerchief pocket of jacket. Return to the theatre, head down to avoid recognition. A quick glance at his watch as he opened the back door and moved silently up the stairs. Nearly thirty minutes had passed.

He knelt at the back of the cupboard and listened to a few lines of dialogue. The moment at which the body was due to give its twitch had gone and Eustace proved his lasting twitching capacity by giving another shudder, of course not seen by the audience because the cupboard door was closed. Eustace had served his purpose. Oliver withdrew him from the sack and switched him off. With slight pressure to get out the air he was quickly reduced and folded into a bundle. Oliver slipped the bundle inside his trousers and secured it with a safety pin. The slight bulge might have been apparent on close examination, but who would carry out such an examination upon stage?

Beautiful, he thought, as he wriggled into the sack for the few minutes before he had to appear on stage. Oliver Glass, I congrat-

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ulate you in the name of Thomas de Quincey and Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. You have committed the Perfect Crime.

The euphoria lasted through the curtain calls and his customary few casual words with the audience, in which he congratulated them on being able to appreciate an intelligent mystery. It lasted—oh, how he was savouring the only real achievement of his life—while he leisurely removed Sir Giles's makeup, said goodnight, and left the theatre still with Eustace pinned to him. He made one further visit to the Underground, as a result of which Eustace joined Charles's clothes in the locker. The key back in the handkerchief pocket.

As he was walking back to Everley Court, however, he realized with a shock that something had been forgotten. The note! The note which said positively that he would be at the flat during the interval, a note which if the police saw it would certainly lead to uncomfortable questions, perhaps even to a search, and discovery of the locker key. The note was somewhere in the flat, perhaps in Elizabeth's bag. It must be destroyed before he rang the police.

He nodded to Tyler, took the lift up. Key in door again. The door open. Then he stopped.

Light gleamed under the living room door.

Impossible, he thought, impossible. I know that I did not switch on the light when I opened that door. But then who could be inside the room? He took two steps forward, turned the handle, and when the door was open sprang back with a cry.

"Why, Oliver. what's the matter?" Elizabeth said. She sat on the sofa. Duncan stood beside her.

He pulled at his collar, feeling as though he was about to choke, then tried to ask a question but could not utter words.

"Come and see," Duncan said. He approached and took Oliver by the arm. Oliver shook his head, resisted, but in the end let himself be led to the bedroom. The body still lay there, the patch of red between the breasts.

"You even told her about Elizabeth's bedtime habits," Dunc said. "She must have thought you'd have some fun." He lifted the black mask. Evelyn looked up at him.

Back in the living room he poured himself brandy and said to Elizabeth, "You knew?"

"Of course. *Would supper at Wheeler's amuse you this evening?* Do you think I didn't know you were acting as you always are, making

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some crazy plan? Though I could never have believed it—it was Dunc who guessed how crazy it was."

He looked from one of them to the other. "You're lovers?" Duncan nodded. "My dreary wife and my dull old friend Dunc—a perfect pair."

Duncan took out his pipe, looked at it, put it back in his pocket. "Liz had kept me in touch with what was going on, naturally. It seemed that you must be going to do something or other tonight. So Liz spent the evening with me."

"Why was Evelyn here?" His mind moved frantically from one point to another to see where he had gone wrong.

"We knew about her from having you watched, and all that nonsense about Charles made me think that Elizabeth must be in some sort of danger. So it seemed a good idea to send your note to Evelyn so that she could be here to greet you. We put the flat key in the envelope."

"The initials were the same."

"Just so," Dunc said placidly.

"You planned for me to kill her."

"I wouldn't say that. Of course if you happened to mistake her for Liz—but we couldn't guess that she'd put on Liz's mask. We just wanted to warn you that playing games is dangerous."

"You can't prove anything."

"Oh, I think so," Dunc said sagely. "I don't know how you managed to get away from the theatre—some sort of dummy in the sack I suppose—no doubt the police will soon find out. But the important thing is that note. It's in Evelyn's handbag. Shows you arranged to meet her here. Jealous of some younger lover, no doubt."

"But I *wasn't* jealous, I didn't arrange—" He stopped.

"Can't very well say it was for Liz, can you? Not when Evelyn turned up." The doorbell rang. "Oh, I forgot to say we called the police when we found the body. Our duty, you know." He looked at Oliver and said reflectively, "You remember I said there was always a flaw in the Perfect Crime? Perhaps I was wrong. I suppose you might say the Perfect Crime is one you benefit from but don't commit yourself, so that nobody can say you're responsble. Do you see what I mean?" Oliver saw what he meant. "And now it's time to let in the police."

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

DONALD E. WESTLAKE

There are many, many ways to kill a person. The method described in this new story by Donald E. Westlake is, to the best of our recollection, unique—absolutely unique. Can you wipe a person off the map with words—words alone? "Playing with other people's heads is dangerous" . . .

RE PORTER

by DONALD E. WESTLAKE

Sometimes Vincent goes too far.

Not that Porter Graize didn't deserve *something,* after the way he'd behaved, but Vincent's revenge, it seemed to me, went beyond even Porter's provocations.

On the other hand, previous attempts to redress the balance of insult had failed miserably. The time, for instance, when Bob Carey had come into the Clam Digger with a copy of Roget's *Thesaurus,* stood at the table where Porter was holding forth on the subject of ArtandBeauty, and simply read aloud in a firm and ringing voice the entirety of item 192, Size. Porter merely sat there, hands pressed to the sides of his round belly as in drawings of Santa Claus, and laughed and laughed while Bob worked his way through the nouns (". . . obesity . . . bulk . . . mass . . . whale . . . hippopotamus . . . mammoth . . ."), the adjectives (". . . corpulent, fat, obese, fleshy, plump . . ."), and the phrases ("plump as a dumpling, broad in the beam, fat as a pig, fat as butter [Shakespeare]"). At the end, Porter himself led the applause.

"I don't know why I didn't throw the book at his fat head," Bob said later, but of course he did know, as did we all. If Porter were

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to be bested, it must be stylishly done, it must be done in a way that he himself would have to admire.

How did Porter Graize become so important in our lives? That's hard to say, impossible to justify. He was fat, as Bob Carey had been trying to imply; he was arrogant; he was rude to the point of policy; he insulted our persons, our talents, and our aspirations; and yet we suffered him in our midst, we listened to his pomposities, we included him in all our group efforts.

When I say *we* I refer to the habitués of the Clam Digger, a tavern on the southern shore of Long Island, virtually within sight of some of the taller buildings of Manhattan. The place itself was nautical to the extreme, though not in that fishnet-and-harpoon fake marine style of so many decorator-done restaurants. The original customers of the Clam Digger, before the turn of the century, had in fact been clamdiggers; the clam rakes and long oars and framed photos of long-scuttled clammer boats were honest.

There were still some clamdiggers among the regulars, but they had their own conclave near the back, where until two years ago the pinball machine but now the Space Invaders stood and blipped. Those of us who gathered along the middle section of the bar and the two large tables opposite were mostly toilers in the lower depths of the Arts, earning our bread and beer by selling our talents to advertising agencies.

We included in our number one tunesmith who was quite a good writer of jingles and stings, and another whose staff seemed limited to half a dozen notes clustered around middle C. In the key of C. Several of us were copywriters, including yours truly, and a few others were graphic artists, men who made their way through life with a ready airbrush and a steady hand. Layout men and one or two junior account executives completed our muster.

At a rough estimate our group was at that time engaged in writing five novels, three musical comedies, two dramas, seven screenplays, and a history of the American railroad in blank verse; also two symphonies, a nuptial Mass based on Beatles melodies, and a Moog concerto; others of us were at work on six oil paintings, two murals, a photographic series of clamshells in natural settings, a tapestry memorializing the first moonwalk, and a found-object sculpture in various metals depicting the alienation between the sexes. We were all either single or single again, all in our late twenties or early thirties. Our mustaches had taken firm root, we were talented and hopeful and spreading our wings, and we were employed.

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And Porter Graize was merely one of us, no more, no less. By day he was a graphic artist for Cosentino, Costanzo & Costigan, a dull outfit whose clients were from that dwindling band, the last remaining staid and stuffy bankers and stockbrokers; for them he drew those little smiling cartoon people in the margin, the ones who point to Paragraph Two. By night Porter took up his chisels and hammers and did woodcuts, some as big as his ego, some as small as the back of his head.

He bragged that his paid-for cartoons took a quarter of his time and a sixteenth of his mind, while his woodcuts were a form of challenge that absorbed even *his* mercurial intelligence with endless fascination. I frankly didn't think much of the few examples of this "real" work I saw, but on the other hand maybe all woodcuts now look like the work of John Held, Jr. (I said that to Porter once; without blinking, he responded, "Held was a giant. I stand on his shoulders. He is a part of what I know." Deal with *that.*)

If it weren't for Vincent, Porter would have taken over our group completely, made us merely an audience for his nightly—post-woodcutting—declamation on the Arts in America. But Porter was not the center of our group, and the reason for that was Vincent.

Vincent Arciere. Tall, slender, black-haired, swarthy, with long-fingered restless hands and glinting keen eyes and a roving impatient intelligence, it was Vincent Arciere who was our center and our leader and in many ways our role model. A painter, Vincent made pictures of that which he knew best—midtown at lunchtime. His crowded street scenes with never a hint of communication or comradeship among the scurrying solitaries somehow evoked both Dali (for his meticulous surrealistic realism) and Hopper (for his lonely urbanites) without actually echoing either one.

Vincent earned his living doing storyboards for commercials—little comic strips, really, sans voice balloons but with arrows added to indicate the direction of camera movement—and occasionally he sold a cartoon to some minor magazine, of which I think my favorite was a drawing all in black and white except for one small touch of red: a row of big tough-looking uniformed soldiers stands at attention, their shirts swathed in medals; at the extreme right a short scrawny nebbishy soldier also stands at attention, on his shirt nothing but the Community Chest donor's red feather.

Vincent's favorite word, perhaps, was "cut," in all its manifestations. If he cut you socially, if he failed to acknowledge your presence or respond to your greeting or remark, you wilted. "Let's cut the

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garbage," he would say, when one or another of us was becoming too pompous about our Art: "Let's cut to the car crash," he would say, when someone was taking too long to get to the point of the story.

(Vincent: "Yeah, yeah, you introduced me. Cut to the car crash.")

The antecedent which led to Vincent's revenge on Porter Graize was this: along several South Shore communities ranging from Baldwin to Bay Shore that summer a softball league had been formed, each team sponsored by a local bar. Inevitably we became the Clam Digger Clamdiggers; unfortunately, none of the actual clamdiggers at the rear of the bar would join us, claiming more urgent business elsewhere, so we had to rely on base-path speed rather than any heavy wood at the plate. Still, among our number we could field a rather respectable team, and when the question arose as to the logo for our uniform T-shirts it was Jerry Carmichael (our lesser tunesmith) who said, "Porter, why don't you whip us up a woodcut?"

"No," Porter replied. "My woodcuts are not for play. But if you'd like something with a bit of class, a touch of intelligence, a soupçon of imaginative talent, I could toss off a bit of something for you in a cartoony way at the office tomorrow."

His offer was accepted at once, a part of our relationship with Porter being our endless effort to expose him to humiliation through his own braggadocio, an effort which invariably failed because Porter simply refused to accept responsibility for his own statements or beliefs. In the softball T-shirt case he did exactly what we should all have known he would do, which is to say Nothing. Absolutely Nothing. Day after day went by, the printer's deadline approached, and still Porter did nothing. "Tomorrow," he kept saying, in his airiest manner. "I'll have half an hour tomorrow to dash it off."

But he never did dash it off, and the deadline arrived, and four of our group—including Vincent—took with great difficulty a day off from work so they could gather at the printer's and cobble up some sort of logo for our team then and there. "Charretting it," as Vincent explained.

But that day had been, for Vincent, the last straw. And so, that evening, he prepared his revenge.

I myself arrived at the Clam Digger a bit later than usual, to find Vincent in a deep murmuring huddle with six of the regulars plus Bill the bartender, a somewhat older man, not personally artistic but with us in spirit. "Hello, all," I said, approaching.

"Come here, Ray," Vincent said, gesturing at me with his usual

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impatience; but then he looked beyond my shoulder and at once turned the gesture to its opposite, waving me away. I turned, and Porter had arrived. In quintessential Porter style he spread his arms and announced, "Porter Graize is here!" And looking casually at him, Vincent said, "No, he didn't show up yet. We expect him later."

Porter, having no reason to guess what doom had just struck, smiled pityingly as one does at a person who has broken wind or made an awful pun. Advancing to the bar, he said, "Not up to your usual standard, Vincent."

"I'm afraid you have the advantage of me," said Vincent.

"As always," Porter said comfortably. Leaning an elbow on the old stained wood of the bar, he said to Bill, "My usual, please."

Bill looked at him, open and engaging. "Yes, sir? What would that be?"

Porter stared. "My usual!" he repeated, getting a bit huffy. "You know me, Bill. Porter."

Frowning, Bill said, "You want porter?"

"I *am* Porter!" Porter cried, and would no doubt have said much more except that the look Bill gave him remained so guileless, so professionally prepared to please. Porter blinked. "Bring me a Molson," he said.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Bob Carey—he of the *Thesaurus*—at the back of the room in quick conference with the "locals," as we usually called the clamdiggers (though we were local residents as much as they). The faces that clustered around Bob in the purplish glow of Space Invaders grinned and nodded. Vincent's scheme was simple, quickly understood, and given the ego of the target it was perfectly appropriate. But to what end?

To *The* End, as it turned out, which is why I say that Vincent sometimes goes too far. Not Death, or not death in its usual sense, but The End nevertheless.

For the first several minutes Porter merely shrugged the thing off as an unimportant short-lived annoyance, a childish prank, ignoring it the way he ignores his responsibilities. The first crack in this self-assurance came when, in response to some comment by a junior account exec named Troy Milligan, he broke into the discussion with his usual confidence, saying, "But isn't talent after all essentially amorphous, a yeast in the cultural environment of the individual brain? To say a man is a *writer* or a *composer* is to define merely the limitation he has set himself, the area he chose to explore while leaving other areas to wither on the vine."

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(I heard Bob Carey mutter, "What's an area doing on a vine?" but no one else seemed to notice.)

"Oh, but talent must be directional," Troy Mulligan was saying. "A man has a talent for *this,* or a talent for *that.*"

"Only because he limits himself," Porter insisted. "Some day a genius will come along—think of Leonardo—who will employ his talent in *every* direction, with equal brilliance. Already we have the painter-politician, the poet-watercolorist, the sculptor-essayist."

"I wish Porter were here," Vincent said.

Porter gave him a look of impatient contempt. "You're becoming boring, Vincent," he said.

"The reason is," Vincent said, unperturbed, "I'd love to hear you in an argument with him. Just about a week ago he was arguing exactly the opposite point. It was egotism, he said, for a painter to think he could be just as good at music. He even wanted people to stay within their *section* of their art, the way he sticks to his woodcuts. I remember he said, 'There's nothing more pathetic than a novelist trying to write a play.' "

"That's right!" Bob Carey said. "He went on about Henry James and Saul Bellow."

"On and on," Vincent agreed.

"Samuel Johnson," I said, remembering the discussion.

"Norman Mailer," Troy Milligan said.

"On and on," Vincent agreed again. "Very persuasive, he was." And he nodded at Porter, saying, "You should have heard him."

Now, in this position before—and Porter had more than once been in the position of having argued at different times on opposite sides of the same issue—his invariable rejoinder had been to quote Walt Whitman: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then . . . I contradict myself; I am large . . . I contain multitudes."

But this time was different. Contradiction was suddenly the least of Porter's problems. The attack on his identity had suddenly turned serious. "Well, of course," he said, frowning, "what I meant last week was—"

"Not you," Vincent said. "I'm talking about Porter Graize."

Something more than simple asperity was in Porter's response. "Vincent, don't be tiresome! *I'm* Porter Graize, and you well know it!"

Jerry Carmichael, our lesser tunesmith, the fellow who had suggested Porter do our team logo, now frowned deeply and said, "What's this fellow talking about?"

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(Jerry and three or four others had come in later than Porter, and to my knowledge no one had specifically and verbally put them wise. It was a mark of their own quickness of mind that every one of them caught the scheme at once, and a mark of Porter's abrasive personality that not one of us leaped to his defense; though I'm sure some of us did feel sorry for him later.)

When Jerry said, "What's this fellow talking about?" Porter gave him a sudden wary look. Jerry was a nice enough fellow, but not particularly talented, nor very much known as a great wit. For Porter to be twitted by Vincent was one thing; to be twitted by Jerry Carmichael was exceedingly something else. "Don't *you* start," Porter said, glowering.

Jerry turned to Vincent. "What's going on here?"

"Oh, ignore him," Vincent said. "He's just somebody Porter sent around to make trouble."

Porter stared. "I'm *what?*"

"That's the truth, isn't it?" Vincent said, looking at him with an impatience and dislike which were certainly not feigned. "Porter sent you around to pretend to be him, because you bear some superficial resemblance—"

"You're both fat," Bob Carey said.

"For instance," agreed Vincent, and went on, "Probably Porter's idea is, you're supposed to go on insisting you're him—"

"Oh, this is absurd," Porter said.

"The idea is," Vincent continued inexorably, "sooner or later we're supposed to get tired of arguing with you, and we'll pretend to agree and accept you as Porter Graize. Then Porter himself comes in having proved some half-baked theory about illusion versus reality."

"Ridiculous," Porter said. He moved to pour more Molson into his glass, but the bottle was empty.

Bob Carey said, "Ridiculous, is it? You're on the button, Vincent—we've all heard Porter carry on about illusion versus reality. One of the *many* things he's a pain in the butt about."

"If you think you're going to play my own games on me," Porter said, beginning to bluster, at the same time waving his hand in a characteristic—but this time unavailing—effort to attract Bill the bartender's attention, "you're very much—"

"Walt Whitman," Bob Carey said.

Porter blinked. "What?"

"A very good point," Vincent said. "Obviously, Porter didn't tell him about that." With a bogus air of helpful sympathy he explained

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to Porter, "You see, every time Porter—the real Porter—is caught in a contradiction, he gives us the same tiresome quote from Walt Whitman."

Bob Carey assumed a Porteresque stance, belly out, and declaimed in a Porterish parody, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contra—"

"I don't say that *every* time!" Porter cried, voice rising, face reddening in annoyance.

"Not you," Vincent said. "Porter."

"Vincent," Porter said, his expression increasingly thunderous, "I've had just about—"

"I think I know this fellow!" suddenly said Troy Milligan, the junior account exec.

"Yes, you do," Porter said, trying for heavy sarcasm and waving his arm once more in a request for more beer. Bill the bartender passed from one end of the bar to the other, oblivious, and poured some draft for the clamdiggers in the back.

"He's an actor," Troy told the rest of us. "I've seen him at casting calls, for commercials."

"Which is where," I said, slipping easily into the masquerade, "Porter would have met him."

Porter glared at me, stung. "Ray! You, too?"

"That's it," Troy said. "Porter saw they looked alike, and dreamed up the gag right there. Coached him in our names, a little background—"

"Actors are quick studies," I said. "They have to be."

"He does a fairly credible Porter," Vincent said, "but with some of the grosser aspects toned down."

"A flattering portrait," suggested Sean Adams, an airbrush artist.

"Exactly," Vincent said, and casually said to Bill the bartender as he again walked by, "I think this fellow's ready for another Molson."

"Coming up, Vince." Bill was the only one who called Vincent "Vince."

Having to get his beer through Vincent's intercession was a heavy blow to Porter. He said nothing while waiting for the Molson to be delivered, but merely gazed at us all, from face to face, his own face illustrative of rapid but inconclusive thought. He knew who he was, of course, but our unanimity was a glass dome covering him, and he simply couldn't break through.

Then the fresh bottle was brought and Bill said, "Here you are,

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sir," with the bland brief smile one gives a total stranger, and Porter sighed. "All right," he said, picking up both bottle and glass. "You'll let me know when it's over." And with a dignity I found rather touching, he trod heavily away down the bar to watch the clamdiggers vie at Space Invaders.

The rest of us clustered around, out of his earshot now—particularly with that infernal *beep-boop-bawp* of the Invader machine—and at last we held a strategy session concerning the scheme which was already so well under way.

Bob Carey began. "How long do you want to go on with this, Vincent?"

"Forever," Vincent said, his eyes hard, his jaw clenched. "There is no more Porter Graize, now or ever."

"Oh, come on, Vincent," I said. "As a gag for a while to put him in his place—"

"Or knock him *out* of his place, you mean," Troy Milligan said.

"Whatever. As a short-term joke," I insisted, "it's all well and good. But as a permanent change? It's impossible, even if everybody agreed to try it."

"I want no more Porter Graize in my life," Vincent said.

"Amen," said Bob Carey.

Jerry Carmichael said, "When I was in college there was a thing one bunch of guys used to do. A dozen or more of them. They'd choose their victim, and at some time in the evening, after dinner, they'd all troop into his room in the dorm and just stand there, looking at him. They wouldn't answer when he talked to them, they wouldn't leave, they wouldn't smile or frown or anything at all, they'd just look at him."

"That could be a real killer," Sean Adams said, awe in his voice.

"Yes, it could," Jerry agreed. "If you didn't know the stunt—and after a while they had to stop, because too many people had heard about it—but if you didn't know, it could drive you crazy. They're in *your* room, people you *know,* and they're just staring at you. It only got out of hand once, when a guy went after them with a hunting knife, but they managed to subdue him and calm him down without anybody getting seriously hurt."

Vincent looked impatient and hostile. "Jerry? What's the point?"

"Playing with other people's heads is dangerous," Jerry said.

"I don't want to play with Porter's head," Vincent said. "I want to remove it."

I said, "I'm sorry, Vincent, but I can't be a party to that."

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Vincent gave me an I-might-have-known look, saying, "You're too good for this world, Ray."

"Now you want to remove me, too?"

"Wait a minute," Bob Carey said. "We've got something terrific building here, let's not mess it up by quarreling among ourselves. We've got him going, we've got the thing working, we all agree that Porter deserves it."

"Absolutely," we all said, and Jerry added, "The only question is, how long do we run it?"

I said, "I think it's gone on long enough already. We've made our statement."

"Absolutely not!" Vincent said, eyes flashing. "He's barely begun to *doubt*. I want to see the certainty leach out of that self-satisfied head like fat out of a ball of suet."

"Well, it can't go past tonight," Troy pointed out. "Unless you want to ring in his bosses and his co-workers and his neighbors and several hundred other people."

"None of whom we know," I said.

"He can be whoever he wants in the outside world," Vincent said. "In *here*, he is no longer Porter Graize."

Well, we argued it some more, with Vincent and Bob Carey taking the most extreme attitude, Jerry Carmichael and I urging the greatest restraint, and the others all positioning themselves in between. The final compromise was that it would last at least through tonight, and we would take a fresh reading of the situation tomorrow evening.

"Now, that means," Vincent said, looking meaningfully at me, "that nobody tells Porter the truth tonight, no matter what. Got that, Ray?"

"I've already agreed," I said, somewhat stiffly. "I'll go along with the group's decision."

Conference over, we were just attracting Bill's attention for another round when some sort of row started back by the clamdiggers and the Space Invaders. Looking back there, we saw that a shoving match was under way, and that Porter seemed to be in the middle of it. Perhaps even the cause of it. Voices were raised, shoulders were pushed by open palms, and it looked as though fists were about to fly.

Jerry and Troy and I headed the *ad hoc* delegation which hurried to the rear of the bar and interposed ourselves between Porter and

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the beetle-browed locals, one of whom was angrily saying, "And if you think you're smarter than me, let's go out in the parking lot."

A fine *non sequitur,* that, but this was no time for a discussion on language. Taking Porter's arm, I said, "Excuse me, you don't know the arrangement here. In this bar we—"

He yanked away, glaring at me with the whites showing all around his eyes. "You got to them!" he cried. "You got them to say all this!"

"The fella's just upset," Troy was explaining to the locals. "A friend of ours brought him in to pull a gag, but it got a little out of hand."

"I'll go along with a gag," said the parking-lot clamdigger, still angry, "but enough is enough. I don't come here to get insulted."

Meanwhile I had Porter's arm again, and this time I succeeded in leading him away. (I think he'd finally realized he was in some physical danger and was prepared to accept a dignified retreat.) "You see," I explained, *sotto voce,* as we moved, "there's two groups of customers, and we don't really mingle. We all—"

"I *know* that!" Once more pulling loose—we'd crossed the border by now—he looked at me with exasperation and anger and something very like helplessness, saying, "Ray? Can't you stop?"

I couldn't; I'd made my promise. "That's right, I'm Ray," I said. Then, noticing that he'd lost both his glass and his Molson bottle, I said, "Come on, let me buy you a round. And from now on, why not just relax, take it easy, go along with things?" That was as close as I could come to telling him that it would be over soon.

I'd meant to be kind, but the result was something else. Porter stared at me, as though horrified, for a long slow second. (It was very hard to meet his gaze, to maintain the façade.) Hostility he could understand; a sympathetic denial ate at his brain. Whispered so softly I could barely hear it, he said at last, "You really believe it."

"Oh, come along," I said, extremely uncomfortable. "Have a beer."

He came along, his expression inward now, as though absorbed in working out some new thought. I bought him a Molson and he thanked me politely but distractedly—two uncharacteristic attitudes for Porter. (He was becoming, I realized later, less himself.)

Jerry and Troy, having calmed the locals, returned and the evening continued, almost like any other evening in the Clam Digger. Porter drank more than usual—perhaps considerably more—and I noticed two or three other people also buying him rounds; buying off their consciences, I supposed, as I had tried to do. Porter was far

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less prominent—or dominant—in the conversation than usual, and when he did speak it was hesitantly, his opinions cushioned in a little nest of qualifiers.

On those few instances when he forgot himself and said something that implied he was Porter Graize he was at once rebuked, usually by Vincent or Bob Carey. From time to time I noticed him lost in contemplation of his own reflection in the backbar mirror.

How much do we depend on others for confirmation and reassurance of our own identity? We are all figures fixed in a great cat's cradle of social interrelationships, our positions at least partly maintained by others' perception of us. In acknowledging to Porter that there was such a person as Porter Graize, but at the same time in denying him his right to be that person, to occupy that interstice in the mesh of human life, we were toying with things deeper and more subtle than we knew or could understand. (Or did Vincent suspect? I've never been sure.)

I think we all drank more than usual that night; the tension was palpable, the need to maintain the pretense, the difficulty of avoiding a sense of sympathy. But there was only one more actual incident, and that involved the parking-lot local. As usual, he and his crowd left before we did, and tonight he paused on his way to glare at Porter and announce, loudly enough to be heard up and down the bar, "I told you I never seen you in here before, and now I'm telling you I never want to see you in here again."

"Hold it there, Jimmy," Bill the bartender said. "*I* say who comes and goes in this joint."

Jimmy shrugged and swaggered out, and I noticed with much astonishment and some concern that Porter hadn't responded in any way, but had merely stood at the bar, swaying, holding tight to his near-empty glass. His expression was befuddled, either by drink or something else.

That might have been the end of it, except that Bob Carey, who in some ways is more determinedly vindictive than any of us, said loudly, "I wonder how Porter would have handled that?"

"The same way," I said, but Vincent gave me a hard look and said, "Porter would be declaiming on the class system by now, I suppose." And turning to Porter himself, he said, "You know Porter. What do *you* think?"

"He— I—" Porter licked his lips, floundered, and at last found a safe pronoun: "You. You're probably right."

No one, not even Bob Carey, wanted to push it beyond that, and

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the conversation faltered forward, gradually picking up momentum until we were almost our usual selves again.

We stayed much later than normal; I suppose we were all hoping for some apotheosis, some release, some *ending,* though we'd already agreed there would be none, not tonight. For hour after hour Porter stood among us and drank, and we denied him his self, until finally Bill had to tell us it was closing time, he wanted to go home, we would all have to leave.

We went out in a bunch, staggering in the outer air, relieved I think to be finished with it at last, at least for tonight. I held back, worried about Porter, who hadn't exited with us. The others left, by car or on foot, and Porter did at last come out to the sidewalk, under Bill's urging. From a little way off I watched him watch Bill close and lock the door. Then Bill said good night and walked off to his car in the parking lot, and Porter continued to stand in front of the place, weaving slightly, gazing with slow heavy movements of his head up and down the street.

The others had all gone. Bill's car drove off, tail-lights red receding dots. Porter and I were alone. I went up to him. "Come along," I said, and almost called him by name. "Come along," I repeated instead. "It's time to go home."

He looked at me. His eyes were very very bleary. "I'm afraid to," he murmured, shaking his head.

"Afraid to go home? Why on earth for?"

He leaned closer. Horror was in his eyes, and desperation. Whispering, clutching my arm, he said, "What if *he's* there?"

I didn't tell him the truth. I had promised—we had all promised—not to tell him the truth that night. I wonder what might have happened if I'd broken that promise?

We never saw him again. His non-appearance the next few nights was taken to be the result of embarrassment, or perhaps time spent preparing some sort of Porterish riposte. But when two full weeks had gone by without his return, I at last told the story of that final statement he'd made to me that night, and I suggested we should look into it, seek him out.

Bob Carey belittled it. "He was drunk! You were drunk as a skunk yourself, Ray, you probably didn't even hear him right."

"I heard him right," I said.

None of us had ever been to Porter's home—nor to the homes of most of the rest of us, our relationships being confined to the Clam

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Digger and the softball field—but when I looked up *Graize, Porter* in the Nassau County phone book there he was at an address less than a mile away. I invested a dime in the bar's phone booth—next to Space Invaders—and was rewarded by a recorded announcement: the phone had been disconnected. There was no new-number referral.

When I announced this to the group, Jerry and Troy volunteered to stop by Porter's house tomorrow evening on their way here. It was implicit that they would talk to him about the stunt we'd pulled and its reason, and they would ask him to come along for a drink.

But the next evening they arrived alone. "He skipped out, left, didn't pay his rent," Jerry said. "Just around that same time."

"His landlady's very mad," Troy added.

"The strange thing is," Jerry said, "he left all his woodcuts."

I miss Porter; I think we all do. There was an innocence, an ingenuousness, in his egotism, and now that it's gone we realize what a useful complement it was to Vincent's cynical assurance. Even Vincent seems to feel the lack of a countervailing simplicity, one clothed in a self-assurance that he can't penetrate. Our conversations are less interesting now, our conclusions less worthy.

Where is Porter? What happened to him? Would he come back, if we found him? We know only that he also quit his job, without explanation.

Did he take on that personality we fabricated that night—a character actor, a quick study, an auditioner for commercials? Unless by sheer coincidence one of us runs into him some day—a coincidence he's likely to do his best to avoid—there's no way to track him down. We don't know whom to ask for; though we gave him a new persona in exchange for the old, we neglected to give him a new name.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA MOYES

In a small country town like Hindlehurst, malicious gossip can ruin the career of a promising young doctor . . .

HIT AND RUN

by PATRICIA MOYES

It was nearly midnight when the telephone shrilled at the bedside. Dr. Steven Hutchins, who had hoped for an early night and a sound sleep, heaved himself up onto one elbow and reached for the receiver. Beside him, his wife Carol stirred, muttered something, and went back to sleep again. She was used to this sort of thing. They both were. Dr. Hutchins was a gynecologist, and babies seemed to delight in arriving at inconvenient hours.

"Dr. Hutchins speaking." Steve tried to keep the tiredness out of his voice. He wondered which of the three or four expected arrivals this was, which anxious husband he would have to reassure with doctorly calm.

"Steve! This is Roger!" Steve sat up straight. This was no midnight birth. This was Dr. Roger Ashburn, a colleague at the small country hospital where Hutchins worked. What was more, Roger sounded desperately upset.

"What's up, Roger?"

"Steve—I'm sorry to ring you at this hour—I just had to talk to somebody—"

"That's okay, Roger. Just tell me what's the matter."

"I've just got home from the hospital." Dr. Ashburn sounded near tears. "You know I was on Emergency Room duty—"

"Yes, but—"

"Steve!" There was a pause, then the words came pouring out in

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a torrent. "Steve, Mary's left me! She's left home! She's taken her jewelry and a few clothes, nothing else. And there's a note—she says she can't stand this one-horse town any longer, and living with a failure, a man with no guts, and—oh, what does it matter what the note says? She's gone, that's all there is to it. Forgive me. I suppose I'm in a state of shock—"

"Roger," said Dr. Hutchins, "pour yourself a stiff drink. Carol and I will be right over. I'll leave your phone number with the hospital in case I'm wanted for an emergency."

Half an hour later Steve and Carol Hutchins were sitting in the small, shabbily furnished living room of the Ashburn house, giving what comfort they could.

"I know it must be an awful blow, Roger dear," Carol Hutchins was saying, "and yet—well, it's not entirely a surprise, is it?"

Steve shot his wife a warning look, but Carol Hutchins was known for a bluntness that often amounted to lack of tact. She went on. "Last time Steve and I were here to dinner—"

"She'd had too much to drink," said Roger. "She didn't mean what she said."

Steve thought, well, it's been said now. No point in covering up. He said, "*In vino veritas*, you know, Roger. She did threaten to leave you. Carol and I both heard her."

"Mary is such a—a vital person, Roger," Carol said. "She's so pretty, and she loves the good things of life, whereas you—"

"Oh, I know." Bitterly. "I'm a failure. Just as she said."

"You're not a failure at all, Roger," said Steve firmly. "You're a dedicated doctor prepared to work in a small hospital for very little money. You're not ambitious—"

"And Mary is, that's her trouble," said Carol. She put her hand over Roger's, but he just shook his head hopelessly. "Have you any idea where she might have gone to?"

"Not home to mother, that's for sure," said Roger. "Both her parents are dead, and she's an only child. In any case, she wouldn't walk out taking practically nothing with her unless she had somewhere to go. Don't be an idiot, Carol. She's gone off with some rich boy friend. It's probably been going on for months, and I've been too blind to see it."

There was an oppressive silence. Then Steve said, "Will you get a divorce?"

Again Roger Ashburn shook his head. "No, not me. Let her, if she wants to. I shall just keep on hoping that—that she may come back."

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"You'd forgive her if she did?" Carol sounded incredulous.

"Of course I would. I love her so much."

On the whole, as everyone remarked, Dr. Ashburn took it very well, considering. In the little town of Hindlehurst, Mary Ashburn's disappearance was a nine-day's wonder, an incomparable source of gossip. Poor Dr. Ashburn. Never did think much of her, to tell the truth . . . stuck up, if you ask me . . . all that blonde hair and cut-glass voice and looked at you like you're dirt . . . and the doctor so hard-working and kind . . . better off without her, if you ask me. The soft West country voices sounded almost venomous.

Roger discussed with Steve and Carol whether or not he should go to the police. But what was the use? There was the note, in Mary's unmistakable handwriting. Finally, Roger did speak to the local Superintendent, who just sighed and said yes, Doctor, he had heard, very sad, but if a lady was determined to leave her husband—well, that was that. Yes, can't be easy for you, Doctor, with everybody nattering about it . . .

It was, as Roger confided to Steve, the malicious gossip as much as anything else which made him decide he could not stay in Hindlehurst any longer. He didn't want sympathy, if it was to be accompanied by the reviling of Mary. A month after his wife's disappearance he applied for a job in a large hospital as far away as possible—in Manchester, actually, way up in the midlands. And he got it—pathologists were in demand, not a very popular branch of medicine, unless you were the sort who assisted in famous murder cases and got on TV and ended up with a knighthood.

Before he left, Roger said to Steve, "If she does come back and finds me gone, she's sure to come to you and Carol. You'll look after her, won't you? And get in touch with me at once . . . If she does come back . . ." But somehow they all knew that she would not come back. Not Mary Ashburn. Not if she had a rich lover and was living it up in London or Paris, as she'd always wanted to.

So Dr. Ashburn moved to Manchester, to a small bachelor apartment on the outskirts of the great city, and worked harder than ever. He had few friends, but most of the hospital staff knew the story of his wife's infidelity, and sympathized. Especially some of the nurses, for Roger was good-looking in a rather harassed way, with a lock of fair hair perpetually falling over his forehead. Still, Irene, I don't know that I'd fancy being married to a man who cuts up dead bodies all day. What d'ye mean, married? He's married already, isn't he, even if she has walked out on him?

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In any case, Roger showed no signs of interest in a girl friend. At least once a week he telephoned his friends the Hutchins to find out if there had been any news of Mary. Nothing. Life—and death—went on.

It was a couple of months later that it happened. Siren screaming, an ambulance raced through the city to where a knot of people had gathered outside a department store on a busy street. In the center, the crumpled body of a woman. Hit and run. Saw it myself. Yes, officer, I did get 'is number, and I 'ope you catch 'im. Poor girl just stepped off the pavement to cross the road, and before you knew it—ah, here's the ambulance. Excuse me, officer. Yes, of course, identification and all that at the hospital, but the thing now is to get her there while there's hope—roll her onto the stretcher, handbag still clasped in shattered hand, face badly lacerated but still recognizable, long blonde hair—siren on again, clear the streets—it was all too late. Dead on arrival. Better get her straight to the mortuary and call Dr. Ashburn.

The shrouded body was laid on the slab. The doctor's assistants, inured to this sort of horror, are sent about their tasks as the doctor himself pulls away the sheet, gently maneuvers the body, turns it over, combs the hair away from the face, and then—

A moment nobody who was in that room will ever forget. A cry of sheer anguish. "Mary! Oh, my God, Mary!"

No doubt about it. Identification papers in the handbag, the broad gold wedding band still on the finger, with *Mary* and *Roger* and the wedding date engraved on the inside of it.

Roger Ashburn, distraught, facing police interviews. "Of course I identify her, Inspector. She's my wife . . . No, anybody will tell you, she left me several months ago . . . I had no idea she was in Manchester. My God, I hope they catch the swine that did it."

They caught him. A doped-up teenager in a stolen car.

Steve and Carol Hutchins came up from Hindlehurst for the funeral. What could they say? The rich boy-friend theory clearly collapsed—Mary Ashburn had been killed on a mean Manchester street, wearing a cheap, mass-produced blouse and skirt under a nylon mackintosh. Maybe her lover left her, and she was too proud to come back. Maybe she found out I was working here, and had come to find me. You're sure she never called you, Steve? Never wrote? Never.

"Well, there's one thing," said Carol Hutchins, well-meaning and

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tactless as ever. "She did have a big life-insurance policy, didn't she? She was telling me—"

Roger Ashburn buried his face in his hands. "As if that mattered."

Shortly after the funeral Roger left Manchester and moved to London. The life-insurance policy may not have mattered, but he cashed it all the same. One hundred thousand pounds. Nice apartment in Kensington. A certain amount of private consultancy work.

What's more, he remarried. Another girl called Mary, funnily enough. Nobody was invited to the wedding. Very quiet, Registry Office. Black-haired and beautiful, was the second Mrs. Ashburn. The couple traveled abroad quite a lot, but no Immigration Officer ever noticed—why should they?—that the second Mrs. Mary Ashburn had been born on the same day and in the same place as the first, was the same height and had the same blue eyes.

Meanwhile, the Manchester police never did solve the problem of Miss Mabel Smith, reported missing from home the day after the hit-and-run incident. Wearing a blouse and skirt—from C. and A. wasn't it, Dad?—and a nylon raincoat. Just went out yesterday to do some shopping, as far as we knew. Well, you could say she kept herself to herself, might 'ave 'ad a boy friend we didn't know about—yes, but wouldn't 'ave thought she'd just run off like that . . .

Put her on the Missing Persons file. Then, over the months that turned to years, forget.

There was a remark made in the hospital canteen the day the first Mrs. Ashburn died, but nobody seemed to overhear it, and it was quickly forgotten. One ambulance attendant to the other: "Funny thing, I could 'a sworn she wasn't wearin' a weddin' ring when we picked 'er up off the street—yeah, perhaps I 'ad better get me eyes tested—'course there was more important things to think of—funny, though."

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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS WALSH

Thomas Walsh is best known for his police stories—stories told not from the viewpoint of police procedure but from the heart of a policeman's lot. So it comes as somewhat of a surprise to read a story by Thomas Walsh that is entirely different from his usual cop capers . . .

SITTING DUCK

by THOMAS WALSH

He woke instantly, to full and complete wakefulness. It was a habit of his, and he had been trained in it for some time now. So he knew at once where he was, who was after him, and what he had to do now. But he also knew that he had to be very quick, careful, and deceptive. He had caught his breath—not long, just half an instant probably, but it had betrayed him. There was someone else in the room with him.

He did his best about it. He drew another breath, trying to make it a sleepy, half-awake murmur, and turned on his side, like a man composing himself for sleep once more. Meanwhile his right hand, in under the pillow, slid upward for the handle of his revolver.

But of course that was no good, either. He heard a soft, faintly amused chuckle in the darkness around the bed, and the narrow beam of a flashlight shone into his eyes. As expected. They had him again. He had been just a little too late, and a little too slow.

"Very good," a voice approved that. "Do not reach for your gun, please. Take your hand out empty, and very carefully. Mr. Eltinge, is it not?"

He did exactly what he had been told to do. He sat up on the edge of the bed, eyes blinking against the flash, and dropped his feet to

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the floor. He did not answer. It did not seem that an answer was necessary. Somehow or other they had tracked him down.

"There is perhaps a little difficulty with one's tongue?" the voice mocked him. "Quite understandable, however. Now put your shoes on and stand up. No little games, please. They will not help you at all. Do just as I say. Would you be good enough to empty your pockets for me?"

He did that, also. No choice. A wallet, some loose change, a half-smoked pack of cigarettes. A hand reached down onto the bedspread and ruffled through them.

"How very odd," the voice said, as if sympathizing with him. "One would at least expect a few small personal papers. St-st-st. But one might try the coat pockets, perhaps. Yes? Oh, thank you. You are most kind."

Harry Eltinge sat on the bed and reached for his shoes. He also said two words—not nice words—and tightened the laces of his left shoe. As he did so, his right hand was concealed in the shadows under the bed, and groped hurriedly for the other gun, the lifesaver. They were always so very confident of themselves, when they had all the odds in their favor. If this one was, also . . .

"But of course," the voice said. "But of a little more interest, this, Captain Vollmer's wallet. Of some use to you later on, it might be; in case of necessity. Coin of the realm. Very useful, in some circumstances. With your permission, of course. Thank you." And the wallet was taken.

But Harry Eltinge had been too anxious to get his hand on the other gun. In reaching for it he had knocked it the wrong way, under the bed, and not toward him. The small scrape of the barrel against the worn rug was not noticed, however, and Eltinge let his breath out thankfully.

"And Captain Vollmer's picture, also. Not much resemblance, certainly. But perhaps a hurried glance at it, if one were authoritative in manner, and managed the proper note of command in one's voice."

Harry Eltinge uttered the two words again quite casually, but with utter contempt. He did it to cover any other sounds as he slipped his right palm again under the bed. He was still groping for the gun, but very quietly and very carefully.

Captain Vollmer's papers were riffled through.

"A good man, Vollmer," the voice said. "He will be missed by us. But to suddenly lunge for his gun in his own office, to shoot him down like a dog in the gutter, and then to shoot down the guard who

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tried to protect him . . . One will pay for that, Mr. Eltinge, and pay bitterly. One should have thought of that before, I think."

"Perhaps one did," Eltinge said. There were a few drops of sweat on his lips. He had the gun in the palm of his hand, and while stamping his right foot, as if to get the shoe set firmly on it, he worked it into position little by little. From the corner of his eyes he kept watching the other gun, but it was still held rock-steady on him. Not time yet, keep talking. "Only two of them? Next time I must not be so careless."

"Next time?" the voice said. "But I am afraid there will be no next time, Mr. Eltinge. Unfortunately. One admires your audacity, however. To shoot two men down before they know what is happening, to race down the front hall and jump into Captain Vollmer's personal car, to dash away in a cloud of dust the next instant . . . What a pity one had to spoil it all by running out of gasoline on the road back there, and then by letting oneself be seen by a country yokel and his sweetheart who were parked nearby, and to allow oneself to be seen running into the woods, in the direction of Reiger's Island . . . That was not at all worthy of you, Mr. Eltinge. Not at all."

The chuckle was repeated, very satisfied with its own cleverness.

"And then to decide that Captain Vollmer's car was safely hidden in that clump of trees, and to further decide that one might risk a short nap here, in order to refresh oneself a bit, with none of us having the least idea of where you were, and of what you were doing . . . That was perhaps the most stupid thing of all, because we were not a quarter of an hour behind you. And of course when we stopped at the yokel's car, which was parked only a short way down from you, and Captain Vollmer's car was pointed out to us by the young man, there was simply no question. It was Reiger's Island for us also. Here, of course, my friends and I had to part, each one covering a different area. And I was the lucky one. You have your shoes on now?"

"On and laced, damn you," Harry Eltinge said. At the same time he got his first shot off, then his second and third. A score of three dead men for the night, and seven in his life. But still, snarling and breathless from the fury of hatred in him, he crouched on one knee, while the other gun clattered and fell, the flash clattered and fell, and the beam of light came to rest now on a long pale face staring in dumb surprise at him, on immaculately polished rimless glasses, and one hand thrust out as in one last startled appeal.

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But of course there was no time to waste after that. Others, too, the man had said, all searching in different areas of the island for him. Where to go, then? The other man's hat and coat—a black coat with a fur collar, and a green Tyroleon hat, not a gray prison uniform, which they would of course be looking for. He made the exchange hurriedly, and ran for the door.

It was very still outside, very dark. Crouching low, Eltinge ran for the woods, heedless for the moment of direction. He ran for perhaps half a mile, crashed into an enormous oak tree an instant later, and found himself lying dazed and stunned on the ground, with a few stars dancing over him in a worn, pre-dawn sky. He got up, still wobbly, and ran again, crashing through underbrush which he did not see, and then had to rest once more, panting heavily, in the shadow of a rickety old barn.

There was an old-fashioned wooden house behind, and while he was still heaving for breath, a dog in the house growled ominously and then began to bark. So Eltinge had to run from the dog also—and suddenly, from the woods left, came a shrill whistle, and then another answering it from a bit farther away.

Spotted again—and this time, because of the dog, they must have a good idea of his whereabouts. He staggered around the barn and into an open plowed field, the loose dirt plunging him crazily from one side to the other. But thankfully there were woods again. He ran ahead in long staggering leaps.

The two whistles signaled again to each other, one on his right, the other cutting in from his left. He gritted his teeth and plunged straight on.

Then a thought came to him—the river. He had seen it when crossing the bridge from the road earlier, but which way had the tide been flowing? Up or down from him? He couldn't decide. But that was his only hope, and so it was necessary to take the chance, right or wrong. Which way? But his sense of direction was gone. If he could . . .

He let one brief snarl of bitter rage and frustration escape him, but of course that did not help either. On then, with the two whistles closing in, one from each side, and now almost behind him.

He became cunning. He was crouched again, running low and fast, when he saw the first pursuer, at the other edge of the field, but cutting beyond him. Why? Then he realized. Back there in the cottage, the dog was still barking, and thank heavens for it. So

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Eltinge crawled on hands and knees until the shadow vanished once more and then he plunged directly ahead, away from it.

There was a low patch of moon in the west, very dim, and beyond it the faint streaks of early dawn in the sky. There was a faint gleam on his right. The river, was it? He raced that way, ran up a low hill, and from the crest there, glimpsed open water, a battered wooden dock, and a rowboat tied at the end.

He felt a slow, helpless grin from himself. So all was clear sailing now, the way out found and no more than perhaps half a mile or so to the opposite shore. He closed his eyes, still grinning foolishly, and braced himself for the one final rush down the bank. But wait a moment! True deliverance here—or a trap baited and set? The thought stopped him like another brick wall. Of course!

There was no necessity for them to run here and there in the dark, searching for him. Leave a boat out in plain sight, unguarded and unprotected, and he would fall into their hands like an overripe plum. That could be the idea. One of them left to watch, hidden behind that clump of trees on the bank, and Eltinge would be picked off like a sitting duck on the run down to it. So was the boat protected or unprotected? Which? And what was he to do? Run for it in one last wild dash, risking everything, or play it out as slyly and craftily as they might be doing?

He cursed softly. Everything was perfectly still down there, not the hint of a sign or movement—which of course meant nothing at all. This was exactly the way they would play it—if the watcher was there! But if he was not, his safety was assured, and within reach.

The choice was maddening—but it had to be made, and made quickly. Dawn was coming on, and there would soon be full light in the woods. No chance against them after that; not the least chance. Everything would be lost then, if the watcher was not present—and all lost because, at the one critical instant, Harry Eltinge had lacked the one small spark of physical courage required to face it.

He made up his mind. He braced himself, teeth gritted, and something, perhaps only an animal, coughed quietly in the shelter of the trees facing him. Instantly he ducked back, heart pounding, lips snarling silently—and the next moment he found himself racing back through the trees behind him.

But he ran following the river this time, within sight of it. Coils of mist curled up and melted away into the pre-dawn freshness and stillness. He ran steadily, on second wind now, eyes everywhere, ears painfully strained to catch even the least whisper of movement.

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And the dawn he dreaded would be here at any moment. A train whistle could be heard faintly behind and then a cock crowing. There was also a faroff chirping of birds, their first drowsy greeting of the day.

And the light also had brightened. He could see the river clearly now, see that it was flowing against him, as it had flowed against him last night. So here again a way of escape was offered. He could turn back now, keeping well off in the woods from the point of danger he had just passed, and make his way over the bridge he had crossed last night. Yes! How far had he come before reaching the cottage then? A mile? Two miles? Three?

He had no idea. But wait again! A train that ran onto an island in the middle of a river would, in all probability, run off it again at the other end. So it was not necessary to go back at all. He had a second chance of escape now, and a much better one. The way off might not be guarded as yet, and if it was not, deliverance lay ahead of him, and not back of him.

But quickly, quickly! There was enough light so that the trees around him could be seen clearly now. Ahead of him, too, he could see another riverbank cottage, and in this one another dog barked.

Or yapped, anyway. A small dog, then, perhaps a Pomeranian? So there was nothing to be worried about. He ran on as silently as he could, able to avoid the underbrush now, and with this new hope giving him added strength. Any moment he would come to the second bridge, the last bridge—and then he would be no longer trapped on an island, practically in their hands.

He had been heard, nevertheless. There was a shout from behind him, from not at all far behind him, and then the flat sharp crack of a rifle shot rang out at him under the trees. Somehow, miraculously, he attained more running speed, scaling over a low stone wall that popped up suddenly before him, and running into something huge and dark on the other side.

In the sudden panic of that sight he dropped his gun, without even realizing that he had, and sprawled forward, hands gripping soft earth, head turned, and saw the huge monster lunging clumsily away in front of him, more startled apparently than he was. Nothing but a cow, damn his stupid brain. He lay sobbing for a moment, at the end of his rope for good and all—and groped behind him for the gun he had just dropped.

It was a hurried and foolish groping. He didn't find it. And now the shouting came again out of the woods, loud and triumphant. It

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drove him ahead blindly, in any direction at all, and he found himself running into the cow again, which this time bellowed out angry protest at such indignity. Somehow he got around it, staggered up a low hill, and collapsed again at the top.

This time he lay motionless for perhaps a full minute. Yes, he thought. He should have risked the boat back there. With it, complete freedom and safety had been offered to him, and what had he done with it?

He crouched on hands and knees, aware of another sound, one which he could not place immediately. Then he understood. He lay with his head against a railroad track, and the humming, stronger and more pounding at each moment, was made by the train coming up behind him.

But there was more shouting now at the foot of the low hill he had just climbed. Two voices this time, two converging voices. He backed away from them, and found one arm supporting him now on a waist-high pile of old railroad lumber. In another moment he was safely behind the pile, and could hear the voices again—sharper question, and even sharper, more urgent answer. "Up there," one of them said. "There is a train coming, Walter. He will try to catch it, perhaps. Come on!"

Then heavy steps running up the embankment, toward him. He froze where he was. How simple it would have been if he had risked the boat—and how simple it would be even now if he had not dropped the gun. He smashed his fist into the pile of wood before him. He had done everything wrong, and had made every possible wrong decision. Twice the clearest possible way out was offered to him, and twice he had turned his head foolishly away from it.

And now the end of it all, as soon as the train had passed. On this side of the embankment almost nothing but level farmland was to be seen, with no possible cover on it within reaching distance. So the end, certainly. He had given them a good run for their money, but he was finished now.

They had him again. And this time he would not get away from them. They would take very good care that he didn't. They knew the area he was in, and they would scour it with all the help they needed, soon at hand. So perhaps a bullet in the head, here and now, would be the most fitting end for him. Why not? He was all done, finished, kaput.

And in another moment he actually stood up from behind the pile of lumber that had shielded him. But even then the damned fools

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did not see him. They were over on the other side of the track debating some point or other. One stood with his back turned, pointing excitedly at the field behind Eltinge, and the other was turned halfway in that direction to see where he was pointing.

The one pointing nodded vigorously, and then started over to Harry Eltinge's side of the track; but the train was very close now, so close that the whistle blasted in sudden panic. The other man grabbed for his friend. The friend gave a quick startled turn of the head—and saw Eltinge.

But at that instant the train puffed heavily in between them, and, over the rise now, struggled to resume speed. A long string of freight cars began rumbling by, one after another. The engineer, sitting with one elbow propping him up, waved a friendly hand to Eltinge, who slowly and dazedly returned the gesture.

It proved to be a long train. Car after car after car, and Eltinge found sudden hope in that. There was no way for the two men to get across the track to him before the train had passed, and so there might be just time enough for him to run down into the field and find some sort of shelter. And the man who had seen him got no more than the flash of a look in his direction. So if the train was a few cars longer, long enough to give him some sort of running start, it was possible the man might think his eyes had deceived him.

Take the chance, then, run for it. Don't be a fool again, as he had been with the boat and the river back there. Run for it!

He started to. But in turning himself toward the field under him, he took one last glance back toward the train, and felt his heart sink in him like a lump of lead. Again his own foolish cowardice had betrayed him. In sight now was the chimney on the caboose at the end. So there was no time to get to the open field before they would spot him. The caboose would be past, and the two men around it and after him, before he could run even halfway down the slope here.

He stopped short, breaking his fall with one knee and one arm extended hurriedly to stop himself. No use at all, give it up, something whispered to him. There was no sense to it any more. He had run far enough, and he was tired of running. A quick, clean end was the thing he wanted now. He had not even a gun with which to defend himself.

So give up to them. Harry Eltinge had offered them a fair run for their money, and was finished for good and all now. He straightened himself, and walked slowly back toward the oncoming caboose.

It was a calm, beautiful morning around him, with everything

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very still. A few wavering streaks of pale mist were rising up from the field; a few birds swung and circled high up, watchful for breakfast.

A lovely morning, Eltinge told himself—and his last. Well, he had done his best, all he could. So be it.

He waited calmly. Three more cars to go, and then the caboose. They were probably preparing breakfast in there. A curl of smoke, bluer than the golden dawn, could be seen whipping sidewise from the stub of a chimney. The two men were probably running down the other side of the train, and they would have their guns out and ready for him when the caboose passed. This time they would ask no explanations from him. They would shoot first, and make sure that way. He had killed Vollmer and the other man, after all, and they must think that he was still armed and dangerous.

All he could hope for was a quick, clean end for himself. He hoped it would not be a messy end, in the stomach or bowels. He would not like that at all. Please, whoever you are up there, one last chance for a decent end for Harry Eltinge.

And it was time now. There was only one more car to go before the caboose. He took his last look at the world which he had never somehow seen or appreciated before, closed his eyes, set his teeth delicately together, and waited for the shots.

There really wasn't a great deal more to it after that. From the next town he called a friend in East Berlin, and then concealed himself in a stand of pine for a few hours. At 2:30 the friend picked him up there, and at 7:30, with the proper papers his friend had brought along, he was through the wall. At the airport he caught the 9:35 plane to London, and sometime about four was sound asleep in his own flat. At nine sharp he reported to the office.

"We were beginning to wonder what the devil happened to you," Roger Pierce said, knocking the dottle from his pipe, and peering at Eltinge over horn-rimmed spectacles. "Old Mosshead was quite concerned about you in fact, fretting and stewing every time we met in the hall. 'Don't worry about Harry Eltinge,' I said. 'He'll be all right. Our Commie friends don't have a police force smart enough to catch him, and if they did they wouldn't have a jail tight enough to hold him.' Well, what happened to you this time, old boy? What sort of mess were you silly enough to get yourself caught in? We expected you back here last weekend. What was the difficulty this time?"

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"Well, point one," Harry Eltinge said, "our friend Kruger, unfortunately. He was caught last week sometime and was quietly executed the next morning. An enemy of the state, and they don't waste time any more over there on such silly old-fashioned things as trials in a legitimate court of law. Then they set a couple of their men to watching his place, hopeful that someone else might turn up, and that someone was me, bright and early the next morning.

"Well, they knew all about me. Poor Kruger had been made to talk, I presume, before they took him into the cellar and shot his head off.

"But of course I was welcomed with open arms, and taken immediately to a nice, quiet police station in the town. There an animal named Walter Vollmer interrogated me, I imagine the way he interrogated poor Kruger, and you can picture how nice that was. But I held out for two nights, denying everything about whom I had come to see in East Germany, and what the message was I had for him. "Then on the third night friend Vollmer really went to work on me. I'll skip the details, if you don't mind. All I'll tell you about them is that I woke up twice last night with the shaking horrors.

"And in fact he had just about broken me when he got a bit careless. I began to—well, to cry. Couldn't help myself, and Vollmer left his gun on the desk and went swaggering to the door to call a stenographer, for my statement.

"Probably I wasn't too—well, rational by then. Anyway, I grabbed the gun, seeing the chance to take him along with me at any rate. Then the assistant he had in the room with him jumped for me, and I had to shoot him, too. Queerest thing I ever saw," he added thoughtfully. "Just a desperate wild shot at him but it caught him dead-center and split the top of his skull into two halves, like peeling a grape.

"There was nothing to do but run for it after that. There were other men in the hall, but they saw me with the gun and dove every which way for cover. Anyway, I made it to the front door and found Vollmer's car waiting for me, the keys in the lock, quite as if ordered. He was the prison bigshot, after all. He could park anywhere he liked.

"You can imagine I got away from there fast. Then I stuck to the back roads, having a pretty fair idea of them from the maps I had, and twenty or thirty miles farther on discovered that I had run out of gas. I hadn't slept in two nights by then, with friend Vollmer working away on me every minute, so all I could do was to push the

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car off the road, into some trees. But a fellow whom I didn't see was parked nearby, with his fraulein.

"But they had stuck closer to me than I had thought. When they came along they questioned the fellow, and of course identified Vollmer's car when he showed it to them. I was so damned bushed by then that I broke into a cottage I found—apparently there was some kind of summer colony on the island I had stumbled onto, and that was where one of them caught up with me. But I pulled the old two-gun trick on him—one under the pillow, the other back of my shoes on the floor—and had to start running again.

"But they spotted me again on another bridge that ran over to the mainland. There a train came along at just the right moment, and it had almost gone by when I realized the position I had them in—they were on one side of the tracks, and little me was on the other.

The train was running slowly, having just climbed a long slope, and I was just about able to catch it, swinging myself up and in at the last moment between the end car and the caboose. After that I hung on for dear life, and finally risked a peek back.

"I could see the other two chaps running around behind me like chickens with their heads cut off. One of them caught a glimpse of me before the train passed between us, but it was only a glimpse, and now I could see him pointing down at the ground, as if insisting that I had stood right there. But the other one waved him off as if he couldn't know what he was talking about, and ran down into the fields.

"At the next town I swung off, afraid that they might have radioed ahead to stop and search the train, and out on the road I hitched a ride from a friendly old farmer. A bit farther on I dropped off and called Charley Cullen in East Berlin."

He stubbed out his cigarette, remembering a field with dawn mist still rising from it, a cow grazing sleepily some distance off, and a battered old freight train rumbling past, with a dingy caboose at the end. Queer thing, he had given up the ghost practically, and then, without even reasoning why, he found himself running madly and desperately for the space between that last car and the caboose.

Pierce's phone rang, and he talked at some length into it. Then apparently he had some trouble in returning to Harry Eltinge's story. He said, "I see," vaguely and reached for some papers on his desk. "And after that, old boy?"

But Harry Eltinge knew that faintly bored tone from of old. One

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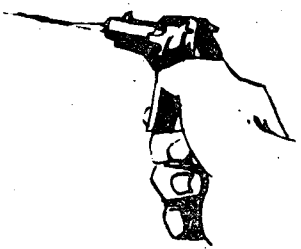
did not put on top hat and tails for such occasions—and he had already talked a great deal about himself, perhaps too much.

"Well, after that," he said, still thinking of the field, the serene quietness of the dawn, and of the very odd feelings he had had, when he had given up and waited as quietly and decently as he could for death to come around the end of the train, "there was nothing much, really, nothing at all. A piece of cake. One simply pushed on, you know."



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a *NEW* short story by

SEICHO MATSUMOTO

"The landlord must have thought it strange that his tenants would arrive in separate cars two nights a week and weekends to spend only a few hours there before going out again." . . . Another kind of "love mystery," this one by the author acknowledged by Japanese critics to be the "Number One mystery writer of the Orient" . . .

THE HUMBLE COIN

by SEICHO MATSUMOTO

Ryuji Hosoda was thirteen years older than Tomoko Murakawa. He had a wife and daughter but he had been having an affair with Tomoko for the last four years.

Tomoko had been a teller in the downtown branch of a bank for the past ten years and because of her efficiency and good looks, she was popular with her superiors.

When she was twenty years old she had been approached several times with talk of marriage and even her parents in Akita prefecture had tried to introduce her to the local young men; but none of them was what she was looking for. When she was twenty-three she had a lover and turned down all the other offers, but she soon found that he wasn't really suited to her and she stopped seeing him. At twenty-five and twenty-six her parents seemed to be getting worried and urged her to come back to her hometown, but she told them that she didn't want to get married yet or to go back to Akita. By the time she was twenty-nine the parents seemed to have given up all hope of seeing her married.

It was at about this time that Tomoko Murakawa first met Ryuji . . .

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Ryuji was an automobile salesman and when Tomoko came to buy a new car he helped her choose the model she wanted, and later on, after they had met several times when the car was being serviced, they started having an affair.

After she had broken off her last affair, she had been scared of making the same mistake again and did her best to avoid any suitors; but judging by the speed with which she fell in love with Ryuji, it would appear that she had secretly wanted a partner all this time. In fact, she felt quite embarrassed at the way she had contrived to seduce him.

It wasn't that Ryuji had deceived Tomoko. He had told her from the beginning that he had a wife and daughter, yet it was he who had first brought up the subject of marriage. It was after they had been seeing each other for about six months that he told her he wanted to divorce his wife but that it would take some time. He asked her to wait for twelve months. One year became two, and three years later he was still married. This wasn't his fault; he had done his best but his wife wouldn't hear of a divorce.

In the beginning they would go by car to various hotels to be alone, but after a while they rented an apartment and pooled their money to furnish it. Being a salesman he often had to work overtime and so he had an excuse to stay in the apartment with Tomoko until late at night two evenings a week. After work he would follow Tomoko's car in his own until they came to their love nest.

Car salesmen also have to visit their customers on weekends and holidays sometimes, so Ryuji had an excuse to be with Tomoko from morning till night on these days, and they were very precious to both of them.

Tomoko would cook their lunch and dinners, but he being very fussy, she had to go to a lot of trouble studying her cook books and experimenting to make something he would really enjoy. The kitchen accessories were all brand-new and everything was bought in matched pairs—the crockery, cutlery, and even the chopsticks.

They had carpeted the living room, bought a color TV and some comfortable armchairs. There were only two chairs, however, there being no need to allow for guests.

In the Japanese room they had two cushions laid out in front of a small red lacquered table with a vase on it and a chest of drawers with a French doll in a display case on top. In the bedroom there was a double bed and a standing lamp with a dark pink bulb in it. All the furniture and the curtains had been chosen after careful

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discussion, so the apartment had the feeling of a newlyweds' first home.

The chest of drawers contained the kimonos and sleeping robes that Tomoko had bought for Ryuji and her own negligees and kimonos. They had shared the cost of the rent and furniture, but Tomoko realized, he being only a salesman and having his own house to pay for, that he didn't have much spare cash. So she bought him the kimonos, buying a new one each time the seasons changed.

They would wear their kimonos while they sat in the living room, but Tomoko couldn't help but feel sad that they couldn't go out together in them as man and wife; but she realized that this was impossible and was thankful for the hours they could be alone.

Ryuji would complain that his wife had no love for him and even less delicacy. He told how she had never really looked after him, and Tomoko had only to look at his clothes to understand that this was the truth and not just an idle complaint. His wife was the daughter of a landowner in Tottori prefecture and although she had lived in Tokyo for some years now, she still hadn't acquired any sense of style; she still behaved as she would in the country.

To make up for this, Tomoko did her best to look after him. Although he was thirteen years older, she couldn't help but mother him, and that was probably why she put so much effort into cooking meals he would enjoy.

"My old lady only cooks the simplest of things but you cook like a professional," he said admiringly.

"You're exaggerating. I don't have enough time to cook anything really well. If I had more time to spend on the shopping I could choose the vegetables more carefully. I can get recipes from magazines but I never have the chance to make anything I can feel proud of."

Even this was only on weekends. During their midweek-evening dates they were too rushed to spend much time on meals, so she made something simple; but even then she tried to make the meals as delicious as possible.

Ryuji was always so enthusiastic about her cooking that she thought he was really cute.

"If we could live together, I would be able to spend more time looking after you," she said.

"If my wife was even half as thoughtful as you, I would probably never have become involved with you to begin with," Ryuji replied.

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Tomoko asked Ryuji how he was getting on with his wife and he answered that things weren't very good. She had guessed that he had a mistress. Of course she didn't know who it was or anything about the apartment, but she thought it strange that considering the amount of extra time he spent working late, his commissions were less than before. He tried to explain that due to the state of the economy, no matter how hard he tried to make a sale, no one was buying a new car at this time; but his heart wasn't in his excuse and he didn't sound very convincing.

Apart from his fixed wages Ryuji would earn a commission on every car he sold and although this used to amount to about three hundred thousand yen a month, since he had met Tomoko, commissions had dropped to about twenty thousand yen.

It was the year before last that Ryuji finally told his wife that he had a lover and wanted a divorce. They had had many arguments before that and Ryuji had suggested that they separate; but he had only been sounding her out and hadn't pursued it until now.

After she had heard Tomoko's name and all about the apartment, Ryuji's wife started phoning her at the bank and arranging to meet her at a coffee shop. The first time they met, Tomoko said quite bluntly that she wouldn't give up Ryuji, but as this didn't seem to affect the other woman, Tomoko knelt on the floor, and bowing her head, pleaded with the wife to give Ryuji to her. The other customers in the coffee shop were amazed, but the women were quite unconscious of the scene they were causing—Tomoko bowing her head to the floor and the other shouting that she'd never heard such effrontery before.

Relations between Ryuji and his wife deteriorated badly after that and he became pale and lost weight. He couldn't concentrate on his work and his sales dropped even more, but she still wouldn't agree to a divorce no matter how much he pleaded with her. He suggested to Tomoko that they leave Tokyo and live together in some other town. An experienced car salesman would be able to find work anywhere, so they had no reason to worry about money; but Tomoko wouldn't agree. No matter how much she loved him, she would never be content to be someone's mistress for the rest of her life; she insisted they must be married first.

Ryuji's wife would come to their apartment and each time Tomoko would kneel on the floor and beg her to divorce Ryuji, but to no avail. The way Tomoko looked at it, the other was only being spiteful in refusing, now that there was no vestige of affection between her

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and Ryuji. However, they couldn't keep the apartment any more, and selling all their new furniture, they went back to their old lifestyle, going to hotels to be together.

After a year of this Ryuji's wife took their daughter and went back to her parents in Tottori. Her parents had been very angry when they heard what had happened and told her that she could stay with them as long as she wanted. Before she left though, she had told Ryuji that even if she was going away for a while, she would never agree to a divorce.

Now that his wife was out of the way, Ryuji and Tomoko could meet whenever they wanted and he often stayed at her place. But even if his wife didn't live in Tokyo any more, she was still married to him and Tomoko found that she couldn't relax, never knowing when her man might be taken from her.

She urged Ryuji to go to Tottori and meet her and her parents and try again to persuade her to give him a divorce. He went, and a friend of his agreed to mediate for them; but although they discussed the matter for a long time, the wife wouldn't budge, she wouldn't change her mind.

Tomoko found herself starting to hate the other woman. Then one day Ryuji's friend called to say that she would agree to a divorce if he paid thirty million yen maintenance money for her and the child.

Of course Ryuji could never raise so large a sum and his wife knew it. It was just another way of saying no, but it was still the only chance open to them.

Tomoko was now thirty-two and probably would never have another opportunity to get married. They could never tell when his wife might change her mind again and refuse point-blank to give him a divorce; so Tomoko decided to go along with the demand.

When she told Ryuji, he was amazed, but she explained that she had fifteen million yen in savings and that when she left the bank she would get another three million in retirement pay. The remaining twelve million she could get on a loan from the bank, since she had been working there for ten years now and had a good credit rating.

Hearing this, Ryuji was ecstatic, but in reality the whole story was a fabrication. Tomoko had only three million yen in savings and even with her retirement pay, it wouldn't come to more than four million. There was no way in the world that the bank would give one of its employees a twenty-six-million-yen unsecured loan;

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but Tomoko was determined to pay off Ryuji's wife before she changed her mind.

She told Ryuji that she couldn't be sure when the loan would be cleared, but that he should go to Tottori and wait and she would come as soon as she had the money. She hadn't been to that part of Japan before, so they could do some sightseeing together after they got the divorce. Ryuji agreed and said that he would stay with the friend who helped him with the divorce and he gave her his address and phone number.

She couldn't tell him when she would get the money as she wasn't sure when the opportunity would present itself; but she did say that it would be within the next ten days, before the end of the month. He didn't question this and proceeded to tell her how to get to his friend's house. She was to go to Yamamori station and then take a bus, but he told her to ring him from the station so he would come and meet her. He left for Tottori on the twentieth of October.

Once he was gone, Tomoko sold the car that had first brought them together, sold her furniture, and made preparations to leave on a moment's notice. She decided to make her move on a Saturday, since the bank closed at three o'clock and no one would notice anything wrong until Monday morning at the earliest.

It was even easier than she had imagined to get the thirty million yen. She simply took it out of the main vault in the bank. She had everything figured out. Her three million would be used to get Ryuji and her set up in their new life and the thirty million would settle things with his wife to get a divorce. The thought burned in her mind like a fever, leaving no room for any other considerations.

Packing the thirty-three wads of cash in a stout black bag she had bought, she put her clothes in an old suitcase and took the bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka. From Osaka to Yamamori she took the night sleeper. She didn't know when it would arrive but it didn't matter, as long as she got away from Tokyo as fast as possible.

She had bought a packed lunch on the bullet train and two packets of Chinese dumplings for Ryuji who was particularly fond of them. This used up most of her loose change and she only had two ten-yen coins and four ten-thousand-yen notes left; but she was sure she could change one of the notes in a café once she reached Yamamori.

Her berth was on the bottom, so she put the black bag containing the money under her pillow where it would always be with her. In the upper berth was a man of about sixty drinking a can of beer, but he soon fell asleep and started snoring. The two berths opposite

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were occupied by a middle-aged couple, and the ones on both sides were occupied by a mother and child and by two girls in jeans who looked as if they were on a hiking trip. There was nothing for Tomoko to worry about and by about ten o'clock they had all closed their curtains and gone to sleep. The car lights were turned out and in the dimness of the pilot light, the conductor walked up and down the corridor making certain all was well.

Two policemen passed through the car, but Tomoko didn't worry about them. She had seen them on the platform at Tokyo and Osaka and although one of them had watched her as she climbed the steps to cross to another platform at Osaka, causing her some consternation, she realized that he was only looking in sympathy at a woman having to carry two heavy suitcases on her own. Apart from that, however, they didn't pay any attention to her.

The reason for her confidence was that this was still Saturday night and the loss of the money wouldn't be discovered until Monday morning at the earliest, so she was perfectly safe until then. Tomorrow morning she would meet Ryuji in Tottori and go with him to give his wife the money. On Monday he could go to the local council offices and register the divorce and everything would be all right. She had nothing to worry about.

But she couldn't sleep. Not only did the snores of the man in the upper berth grate on her nerves, but she was still tense. At last her future was assured and she could go to some other town where she would never be discovered and live happily with Ryuji.

It's strange, but once people set their minds on something, they don't always act in completely rational ways. It wasn't that Tomoko hadn't realized that the police were going to be looking for her; it just didn't seem to be such a danger so long as she could get the money to Ryuji for his divorce.

This wasn't just groundless optimism either, as there was a good chance that the bank would hush up the affair rather than lose the confidence of its investors. Six years before, one of the employees had swindled the bank and it was only recently that business had started to pick up again. If they were to announce that a female employee who had been working there for ten years had absconded with thirty million yen, it would probably cost them a lot more than that in the long run. So there was reasonable hope that they would make up the loss without going to the police.

Tomoko finally fell asleep. She was completely exhausted from the strain of the day and was fast asleep when the conductor came

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to tell her that her station was next. It was ten past four when she got off at Kurayoshi and she had two hours to wait until the train for Yamamori was due. A lot of people got off at the station, but she was the only one who was going to wait for another train.

She looked into the waiting room. There were six men sleeping on the benches there. Clutching her black bag, she walked up to the ticket window, but the window was closed, and the shutter was down at the newsstand.

It was very cold and she walked around to try and warm herself. She noticed a public phone behind the newsstand and thought of phoning Ryuji, but glancing at the clock she saw that it was still only five o'clock and she decided it was best not to disturb the family he was staying with at such an early hour.

But she wanted to get in touch with him. There she was, a stranger in a deserted railway station with only six rough-looking men sleeping in the waiting room for company, and she was carrying a fortune in cash. She felt her nervousness mount along with her loneliness as she looked around at the empty cans and trash littering the half-lit station. She chose a bench as far as possible from the sleeping men and sat down to wait, her wretchedness being accentuated by the bitter cold.

It was a long two hours, but eventually people started arriving at the station and the ticket office opened. The workers woke up, and yawning, shambled over to join the line for tickets. Seeing them all looking her way, Tomoko was relieved that there were other people around. If she were alone, she wouldn't have known what to do.

On board the train at last, she sat watching dawn breaking over the mountains as she sped through stations whose names she had never heard before. The six workers all got off at a place called Sekigane, and one of them looked back and waved to her before setting off with his companions. They looked like lumberjacks and were all in high spirits. Her station was the next but one.

It was seven o'clock when she arrived at her destination, but because of all the high mountains surrounding Yamamori, it was still not light. Ignoring the mist-enshrouded views of the maple-covered mountains, she hurried to the phone booth in front of the station.

Ryuji's friend lived in a village in the mountains about fifteen miles from the station and he had told her that as it was on a

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different telephone exchange, she would have to use a hundred-yen coin or she couldn't get through.

Tomoko opened her purse. There was nothing inside except the two ten-yen coins and the four ten-thousand-yen notes. She had used up all her hundred-yen coins when she had bought her dinner on the bullet train the night before.

She left the phone booth and walked around to the cafés near the station. They were all closed, so she went back to the waiting room, carrying the heavy black bag all the time. The station newsstand was closed and there wasn't a change machine anywhere. Even if there had been, it wouldn't have done her any good as it would only take a one-thousand-yen note, not a ten.

She walked up to the ticket office and after looking at the price list, she chose a station that would give her three hundred yen in her change, and queued up. When her turn came, she produced a ten-thousand-yen note, but the clerk told her that he couldn't change it and asked for something smaller. She explained that this was all she had and asked him to see what he could do; but he told her that he didn't have enough change this early on a Sunday morning and suggested that she pay when she got off.

Hearing that he wouldn't be able to change her note for at least two more hours, Tomoko went back to the waiting room. She asked a local man what time the café next to the station would open and learned that as this was Sunday it wouldn't open before ten o'clock. Even after it opened it would probably be some time before they could change her money and she realized now that no matter how hungry she may have been, she shouldn't have bought that meal the night before.

She couldn't wait another two hours, she just couldn't. She had already wasted two hours waiting for her train and she wanted to speak to Ryuji as soon as possible and tell him that everything was going to be all right.

After inquiring, she learned that the first bus would leave in an hour and a half. She had to get in touch with Ryuji. She couldn't wait any longer. She had to give him the money before someone guessed who she was and what she had in the black bag.

She thought of buying a ticket to Osaka or some distant place which would be expensive enough for her to use a ten-thousand-yen note, but she was loath to buy something she wouldn't use, and it never occurred to her to buy one for the next day and then have her money refunded later.

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A hundred yen. One hundred yen.

She had never given much thought to the humble coin before, but now she felt that little nickel coin was a lot more valuable than the thirty-three million yen she had in her suitcase. She realized that when her superiors at the bank had told her to think of the ten-thousand-yen notes as mere printed paper, they had been right—the notes were worthless next to a hundred-yen coin.

Ten minutes later Tomoko lined up at the ticket office again. The woman in front of her had just bought a ticket and five one-hundred-yen coins had come through the window in change. The woman was distracted by her child crying and seeing the coins just lying there, Tomoko couldn't stop her hand from stretching out to take one.

The next moment the woman was screaming and two station employees came toward them. One held the now pale Tomoko while the other went to call a policeman.

Clutching the black bag with the stolen money in it, Tomoko watched blankly as the policeman hurried toward her.

DETECTIVERSE

A DOUBLE SCORE

by M. EDWARD HOLDEN

The killer stalked his golfing prey
Through fairway, rough, and green,
And waited till he knew for sure
His crime would go unseen.

He caught them on the thirteenth tee,
And when the deeds were done
He'd strangled Victim Number Two,
And shot a hole in One!

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

You are about to enjoy EQMM's 592nd "first story," about a fatally ill butler with an inconquerable determination to write before he dies.

The author, Ted Singer, is a New Yorker with a bachelor of arts degree from City College, class of 1940, and a master of arts degree from Columbia Teachers College, where he majored in English. During World War II he was an artillery observer in Europe from D-Day in Normandy until V-E Day. He worked in newspaper advertising for 25 years and when the newspaper ceased publication, he retired. He took up jogging, grew to love it, and ran in the '78, '79, and '80 New York City Marathons. A leg injury kept him out of the '81, "but not the '82."

And now for Mr. Singer's first contribution to fiction, a story as delightfully dry as a taste of rare Mouton Rothschild . . .

ONCE MORE THE BUTLER

by TED SINGER

Seymour Lendt, butler to the Earl of Windbourne, pressed the Syrette point against the cork of the Mouton Rothschild bottle. Slowly he injected an inch of death into the priceless wine. Then he laid the bottle on its side into his suitcase and covered it with a towel and two shirts.

"Karen!"

She answered from the kitchen.

"Yes, Duck?"

"We're quitting service. At once. Pack your things."

She walked silently into their bedroom.

"What did the doctor say?"

"He agreed with the emergency physician and the heart specialist. According to socialized medicine, I'm dead. All that keeps me from

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the grave are heart pills and my unconquerable determination to write before I die."

"But—where can we go? All we have are our jobs."

"We'll find a garret. I'll write, as I once planned. But then we married and I was temporarily sidetracked by this job fifteen years ago."

"But all these years you've never—"

"That'll change. My wishes are irrevocable. Beyond tomorrow, not a breath in butlership."

"Duck, you're too upset. Why not wait a bit? I'll speak to Charlie—Lord Windbourne. I'm sure he'll help us."

"You may speak to—Charlie, if you wish. But this is our last day."

"Don't fret, Duck, we'll see to you."

She ran back to the kitchen to finish preparing dinner.

He sat on his valise.

"Duck, indeed."

"So!" roared Lord Charles Windbourne, smashing Seymour on the shoulder. "All these years the butler has been doing it, been accused of doing it, or acted as if he did it. Now he wants to write it. Well, why not? Sorry about your disaffection, Si. But I hate to lose you. All these years I've been regaling the local wellborn as the only Earl of Devonshire with a Si Lendt butler. We have few other standards and it's kept my table talk bright. I'll miss you.

"But Karen! Ah, there! A horse—pardon—of another hue. Quite indispensable. Not just for me. But Milady Alice—confined as she is, great crank that she is—wouldn't hear of it. If she could hear at all, which is still another matter. Poor Alice. We must think of others, dear Si, at whatever sacrifice. How then does the cat swim the lake?"

Seymour watched his employer's diaphragm swell and waited for the rest of the speech. Windbourne indeed, he thought.

"I have a proposal, Si. You are sacked."

The shock of the words, then the unexpected silence made Seymour dizzy. He excused himself and gripped a fluted chair-back. He realized, his head suddenly heating, that this stopgap job, which had lasted fifteen years, was his real life. His desire to write was a vision, a carrot on a stick jouncing in front of a— He blinked away the picture.

Then Lord Windbourne's diaphragm tremored again.

"Now! I dub thee no longer Si, but Seymour, and you are my guest.

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You've been elevated to middle-class status—that of penniless writer. But you are fortunate. An ancestor of mine once dropped in on the author of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Something or Other* and debased himself forever by saying, 'Scribble, scribble, eh, Mr. Gibbon?'

"Don't say we learn nothing from history. I, as your patron, agent, and guide, am sending you to Ghost Cottage! Yes, to my cabin atop Spectre Hill, built on the gibbet site where another ancestor of mine hanged poachers, assorted churls, and such ilk for all Devon to see and profit by. Ought to be full of atmosphere for you. As you know, the larder is full, the conveniences ready. It may be the loneliest spot in the British Empire, but it's marvelous if you bring your own quail. It's yours, as long as you like. Karen and I'll drive you down as soon as you're packed."

Seymour considered quickly and realized he could fare no better.

"Thank you, sir."

"Charlie, to those dear to me."

"Charlie."

"Now load, load, load—eh, Mr. Lendt? Time is essence and all that."

The Rolls whispered along the narrow hedge-lined road, rising over the turtleback hills of Devon. Lord Windbourne drove and chatted with Karen in the front seat. The glass divider muffled their words. Seymour peered out at the constricting twilight and knew when he entered the cabin he would begin to face his true destiny. It was do or die, perhaps both.

He hoped the cottage had to be swept again, the dishes rewashed. There had to be something to do before he started to write. He blinked and shook his head. Write he must or call his dreams of all these years a delusion. Or confess, for reasons he never dared face, that he was no writer. Or envision his tombstone with the occupation Faithful Butler on equal billing forever with his name.

He snarled, and determined to begin typing the moment they left.

As for the poisoned wine, that would be his sweet way to shuffle off when life became unbearable. Not for failure to write, but when, as the doctors made sure to warn him before he fled the hospital, his heart would bring too much pain.

He heard the engine click into low gear at the steepness near the hilltop, the last panorama of so many forgotten offenders. Headlights cast a yellow arch on the cottage door.

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Lord Windbourne slid out. "Dismal, eh, Seymour? Haunted, you know. Here, let's install you."

He and Karen carried the bags inside.

"Dial us for any reason," Lord Windbourne said, preparing to depart. "Ghosts, pain, cricket scores. Good luck! And goodbye. Hurry, Karen."

His handshake was numbing, her kiss feathery.

Seymour watched the Rolls' lightbeams sink slowly downhill into blue night. Then he plodded back into the cottage to work.

Silence was palpable. Every noise seemed louder than usual, as if his ears were suddenly unplugged. He sat on an orange loveseat under a red-shaded lamp and promptly felt drowsy. A short nap would help. His eyes burned. How they burned! He slept.

Knocks at the door woke him. How could anyone have gotten to this inaccessible hilltop?

"Who's there?" he called.

No answer.

He opened the door. A chill struck his chest and wound around his temples. By the gibbous moonlight he could see the small bushes surrounding the cottage.

"Who's there?"

The sky, hanging heavily, made him feel he could just look at the stars, ask a question, and hear the answer. But he heard just a breeze and saw no one.

Inside, he avoided the loveseat. At the typewriter, he pecked out summaries of the mystery plots he had concocted. Then he read them back. Strange how he felt he had seen them before. Possibly in old pulp magazines. Or on the telly. But he would put his individual stamp on these plots. Now, which one first?

Again he heard the knocking.

This time a chill seized and shook him. He rushed to open the door, but saw no one. He shouted, but the words were snuffed by wind and darkness.

He slammed the door, sat in the loveseat, and felt his eyes burn again.

He unbuckled the suitcase, tenderly unpacked the Mouton Rothschild, and set it on a table, by a decanter and glasses. Perhaps its threat would force him to write. So far he'd forgotten his need for heart pills. The thought made his heart pound.

He began his first story. But the words, as he read them back,

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were not at all what he meant to say. The murderer seemed so easy to detect. Why bother killing that way? What about the detective? How scatter the clues?

Seymour began to perspire. He had never sat down to face his dream so nakedly before. It was embarrassing, though he was alone on a hilltop, beyond words. He felt his neck and collarbone throb. He swallowed a pill.

Before he could notice any effect, he heard the knocking again. Now he became angry. "Answer me!"

Silence.

He stared out the window until a pain made him wince. He touched his chest and sat stiffly at the typewriter. He sat without closing his eyes or remembering for a long time.

Then, with a sigh, he realized his left arm ached piercingly. He lifted the phone, looked curiously at it, then dropped it.

He reeled to the bathroom. In the mirror his face was that of a wiser twin brother about to tell him terrible news. The next knocking barely stirred him.

He uncorked the wine bottle and slowly, gripping it with both hands, emptied it into the glass decanter. Then he poured half a glassful, held it over the red-shaded lamp and savored the brilliant color. He swirled it tenderly, then waited. But his hand shook too much for the wine to level. He sniffed, wept at the exquisite bouquet, then drank a sudden mouthful. In a fit of ecstasy, he emptied the glass.

He slid to the floor, smiling at the typewriter and the empty pages. A vision of Karen flashed and vanished. He wondered, the moment before he died, how much better the wine could possibly have tasted without the prussic acid.

"See, Sweets? There he is. Like a board. I told you. Ask my adulterous friends—an unexpected rap at an isolated cabin door would shake anyone. Especially an impressionable sickly quid like Seymour. I'll venture he panicked at the third knocking. Tried to phone—and whoosh! Well, that tears it, Sweets. We're alone forever, with poor dribbling Lady Alice to stay alive and keep our thing acceptable."

They kissed fervently, with Lord Windbourne's left shoe crimping Seymour's beatific rictus.

"This'll be our trysting spot again, as soon as the police clean him up. But first let me collect my tape recorder with all the knock-

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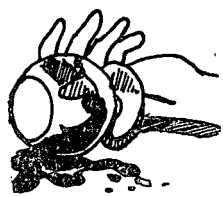
knocks in it. Oh, will you look at this? The rascal stole a bottle of my Mouton Rothschild! And he decanted it! I wonder how long that's been going on, the scamp! Did you know about this, Karen?"

"It had to be the sickness that made him not care. You know my heart's an open book, Duck."

"Hmm. Well, his is closed. And unwritten. Ha, look at this priceless wine, wasted on Si, of all people. Well, we can't pour it back. Before we ring the police, we'll celebrate with a toast or two to perfect crime. Here you are, Sweets. See that marvelous color? Now swirl it, the way I do. That's it. Now—ecstasy! To us, and to Seymour, the butler who did it!"

They drank.



DETECTIVERSE

MODEST OPERANDI

by RALPH W. McCOMB

There was a young chap named McSnow
Who wanted his friends all to know
He preferred his demise
To be witty and wise—
If they killed him with kindness he'd go.

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a *NEW* Detective Ganelon story by

JAMES POWELL

"These murders have created a climate of fear." What a case, marveled detective Ganelon: a mad hunter of vampires on the prowl in a city where men sleep in their coffins . . . Details and touches—delicious details and tantalizing touches . . . Shades of Dr. Fu Manchu! Shades of Count Dracula!

THE VIGIL OF DEATH

by JAMES POWELL

Rain pin-striped the headlight beams as the white Terrapin convertible sped through the last hour of darkness. It was an August morning in 1938 and suburban San Sebastiano slept on every side. Behind the steering wheel detective Ambrose Ganelon, the third to bear that name, squinted into the unfamiliar roadway. With two fingers he found the pack of cigarettes in the pocket of his dinner jacket. The flaring match revealed a drawn face without the famous roughneck grin.

There was his turnoff. But as Ganelon swung into the country lane a truck with a small wooden house built behind the cab came barreling out. Swerving to avoid the tall tottering vehicle he caught a flash of carved eaves and bull's-eye windowpanes. Then the Terrapin bumped down into the ditch. In his rearview mirror the detective watched the rustic caravan take the corner, a spare tire slapping against the roof as it passed under a rural street light. Then the vehicle rushed away into the rain and darkness.

Ganelon gunned the Terrapin back onto the road. A hundred yards farther on he saw a name and swung into a driveway. He stopped before a stucco house and dashed for the open door. He didn't wait

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for anyone to answer his shout. Attic or cellar? A light at the end of the hall answered that question.

The air smelled of rats and the flight of stone steps led downward. Before he reached the bottom Ganelon saw the coffin lying across two sawhorses in the middle of the floor. Inside the plain pine coffin lay the body of Andre La Motte dressed in a shroud, with a wooden stake driven through the heart.

Ganelon went back upstairs and found La Motte's liquor cabinet. He poured himself a stiff Scotch, added a short splash of water, and telephoned Assistant Chief Inspector Picardy. Then he dropped back into a leather armchair to drink his drink and think his gloomy thoughts.

The week before, a gray fog had descended on the Principality, a warm fog by day and a steady cold rain by night. One morning the body of a wealthy stockbroker, Paul Duclos, was discovered by his housekeeper in the attic of his townhouse on the Boulevard Tancredi; the body lay in a plain pine coffin, dressed in a shroud, with a stake through the heart.

Public horror turned to hysteria when the full circumstances of the bloody deed came to light. By the time the murderer struck again imagination had tranformed the black-caped figure seen entering Duclos' townhouse at dawn into a giant bat flying into the bedroom window of a second-hand book dealer named Bellot. That same day, on her weekly visit to his untidy rooms above the shop on the rue Elzivir to pick up his laundry, Bellot's married sister found him, shroud, coffin, stake and all in a room she had never seen unlocked before.

And now La Motte. Ganelon gazed glumly into his drink. He'd planned on spending this night out beyond the three-mile limit. As a reward for saving Archie Maconochie's gambling boat for him when Lady Emerald Fong and her hatchet-wielding highbinders fought for control of the waterfront, Ganelon had been admitted to Maconochie's private game. But the wily Scot had no scruples about taking Ganelon to the cleaners at cards. After all, the Ganelon-Fong rivalry was a long-standing one, born almost a hundred years before when Ganelon's grandfather, the founder of the Ganelon Detective Agency, frustrated Dr. Ludwig Fong's scheme to kidnap the young Queen Victoria and sell her on the Timbuctoo slave market.

But that evening, at the precise moment after the swifts tumbled down into their chimneys—which is to say, at the precise moment before the bats emerge to occupy the night—Ganelon stepped from

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his door on his way out to the gambling boat and came face to face in the fog with a thin young woman in a white raincoat, with short blonde curls peeking out from under the brim of her close-fitting felt hat. Her eyes were gray when she looked at him and her accent was foreign when she spoke. "My name is Maritza Vladon, Mr. Ganelon," she said. "I must speak to you about the two dead gentlemen." She used a hollow fist to mime the driving of a stake into a heart.

Ganelon led Maritza Vladon back inside and across the foyer into the agency offices. They passed among the desks at one of which Ganelon's second-in-command, Victor Kouskousian, sat closing the Tedesco file. The man turned to admire the woman's ankles as they passed.

Ganelon had barely closed his inner office door behind them when she blurted out, "You see, my grandfather killed them." Then just as abruptly she fell silent. Though Ganelon made encouraging noises, she sat on the other side of his desk for several minutes twisting her hands in her lap.

"Above our village in the mountains of Transylvania stood an old castle," she said at last. "One summer it was rented to a reclusive party of foreign visitors. At night every window blazed with light but after sunrise no one stirred. Soon there were stories of sighting immense bats and of a mysterious hunting coach on the night roads surrounded by a pack of wolves with silver-studded collars.

"Some claimed the visitors were vampires. As the village schoolmaster, my grandfather felt obliged to mock such superstitions. So did my father, the village doctor. But then at summer's end my mother fell ill of a wasting disease which my father was unable to diagnose. Quite suddenly she died. My father grew thin and pale and quickly followed her. The doctor from the city said it was a disease of the blood. The village made a daylight assault on the castle and found it empty. Later we heard tales of rough-looking gypsies and a cart loaded with coffins hurrying down a back road."

The telephone rang. Ganelon excused himself to speak to his old friend Father Cesaire, the Prior of the Abbey of the Holy Vernicle. During the Great War, when Ganelon wore the garnet trousers of the Grenadine Guards, Father Cesaire had been his commanding officer. The priesthood came later. Now the Prior asked Ganelon to visit him at the Abbey at ten o'clock that evening. The urgency in the man's voice made Ganelon quick to agree. Then he turned his attention back to the woman in his office.

Continuing her story, Maritza Vladon told how, after the death

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of his son and daughter-in-law, her grandfather gave up his teaching job to immerse himself in the lore of vampires. Soon old Vladon was making a living in the countryside selling talismans and nostrums to ward off the Undead. As the years passed he became well-known at home and abroad as a master of the Stake of Deliverance, the device driven through the heart of corpses suspected of being walkers of the night. And everyone knew the story of his search for the coffins from the castle above the village, coffins he could never trace beyond Bucharest.

Then three weeks ago her grandfather came to her waving an envelope with a San Sebastiano stamp. Inside was a yellowed bill of lading dated 1923 from a Bucharest carting company describing the shipment of a coffin-sized wooden crate from Bucharest to San Sebastiano, by way of Trieste aboard the S. S. Almaviva. Across the bottom in bright new ink someone had printed: "To learn more be in San Sebastiano at the northeast corner of the rue des Marchands de Vin and the rue de Begat on August 12 at 10 a.m."

"Grandfather insisted we come to San Sebastiano, Mr. Ganelon," she said. "I could hardly refuse. Growing up with him, I quickly saw how the slightest doubt about the existence of vampires threw Grandfather into a black rage. He was convinced the Undead outnumbered the living and bore him a particular grudge. I pretended a hatred of vampires, too, because that made him calmer and less lonely.

"We stayed with Rumanian friends behind their restaurant outside La Truc. On the day stated in the bill of lading Grandfather drove our truck caravan into San Sebastiano and returned wide-eyed to announce that maybe we'd stumbled on a whole nest of vampires. That very evening—to check things out, my grandfather said—we paid a visit to a Dr. Valentin Nivelle in his office at the Medical Research Center. Grandfather pretended an interest in blood research. While the doctor talked about himself and his work, my grandfather was jabbing me in the ribs at whatever the man said or at the bare, cross-shaped spot on the wall behind him.

"A few evenings after this unsettling performance he came back from town excited again. I tossed and turned with worry all night. Then, just in case, I stole the mallet and stake from his vampire-hunting valise and threw them into the first trash can I could find. The truck caravan was gone by the time I got back. But I still didn't believe Grandfather could really harm a living thing. The newspapers that evening told me how wrong I was." She shook her head

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regretfully. "Since then I've searched everywhere for him, hoping against hope he wouldn't kill again."

"But last night he did," said Ganelon. "And now what do you want of me?"

"These murders have created a climate of fear," she replied. "I'm afraid your police will shoot first and ask questions later. But you can find my grandfather and persuade him to give himself up. I want him put some place where sick old men can get help."

Ganelon got out of the leather armchair and poured himself another Scotch from the late Mr. La Motte's supply, this time without water. He carried the glass outside into the rain where he could examine the unusual marks on the driveway. Clearly the caravan had suffered a flat. The jack had been placed here; the spare tire tossed down from the roof there.

Ganelon sipped his drink, then stooped over and picked up something from the driveway gravel. The gray, almost translucent stone in his palm had a round point at one end and was flat and shiny at the other like a tip broken from an icicle. Ganelon slipped the object into his watch pocket, folded his arms, and stared off into the rain.

He took Maritza Vladon's case, stipulating that he would bring the police into the matter whenever he felt it would prevent another killing. Finding the old man wouldn't be too great a problem. A truck caravan with Rumanian license plates would be a difficult thing to hide. He set Kouskousian to the task. He would pay a visit to Dr. Valentin Nivelle himself. But first there was his appointment with Father Cesaire.

The Abbey of the Holy Vernicle once stood alone on a small rural hill. But over the years San Sebastiano had marched out through the city gate and surrounded it. Today the holy walls were overlooked all around by the tall apartment buildings of the fashionable La Colline quarter. Publicly the neighborhood objected to the Abbey because of the many derelicts the monks' excellent soup kitchen drew. Privately they took comfort from the many bells calling the monks to prayer. Every few years alarm swept La Colline with the rumor the Abbey had been sold to make way for a rendering plant or a company making breakfast food shot from guns.

Ganelon followed the rough gray habit of the porter down the monastery hallway. It was lined on one side with monks' cells. The other opened onto the herb garden where grew the more exotic ingredients of the liqueur that was the Abbey's livelihood. Somewhere

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in a dark, rainy corner of that dark garden, in a small hut of daub and wattle, lived the Abbot of the Holy Vernicle, a hermit among his own monks. This gaunt, hawk-nosed octogenarian wrote books of the most uplifting and lucid prose concerning the human condition and world peace. (Both sides credit the Abbot's writings with shortening the Great War by several months.) The task of running the monastery he had long ago given to Father Cesaire.

Though grayer now, the Prior still wore that frank gaze which had carried him through the horror of the trenches. He ushered Ganelon into a small, sparsely furnished office. Ganelon thought they were alone until another figure stepped out of the shadows by the window. "I believe you know Count Mondragon," said Father Cesaire.

Ganelon and the Count bowed to each other politely. Mondragon, an aloof and silver-haired man whose skin looked cold to the touch, used to be a regular night visitor aboard Archie Maconochie's gambling boat.

"I asked the Count because this matter involves the Knights of the Holy Vernicle," said Father Cesaire. "He is their commander here in the Principality."

To cover his surprise Ganelon offered his cigarettes around. The Count demurred. But Father Cesaire accepted one, hoping perhaps to recapture the camaraderie of the trenches.

Like the Templars and the Hospitalars, the Knights of the Holy Vernicle found their origins in the Crusades when they built, supported, and protected hospitals and hospices for pilgrims to the Holy Land. Unlike their brother military orders they were never to accumulate enough fatal wealth to become moneylenders to kings, the seed of the others' suppression. Guided by the monks of the Holy Vernicle, the Knights occupied themselves with worldwide philanthropic enterprises. Today in San Sebastiano they maintained the charity hospital of St. Pie and the Medical Research Center. They cherished their anonymity. When the Knights appeared in public during the processions of Easter Week, for example, they wore gray robes and high peaked hoods which hid their faces and gave them a slightly sinister air. The matter must be a serious one indeed for the Prior to identify Mondragon as the local commander of the Knights.

Mondragon said, "Mr. Ganelon, the two men who were killed, Duclos and Bellot, were members of our governing Council of Five performing the Vigil of Death."

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Ganelon's blank stare prompted Father Cesaire to say, "The Vigil is a kind of *memento mori*. Each Knight takes his turn sleeping in a shroud in the pine coffin he'll be buried in some day. The purpose is to remind them of death and the vanity of material possessions."

"The Vigil's an ancient practice most recently revived," said the Count. "A bit morbid for my taste. But I couldn't make that point with the High Council, although the Grand Commander, God rest his soul, backed me up."

"Have you gone to the police?" asked Ganelon.

"We hoped you could handle that for us," said Father Cesaire, adding, "Playing down the Knights as much as you can, of course. Why rake up the past?"

What a case, marveled Ganelon inwardly. A mad vampire hunter on the prowl in a city where a group of charitable men sleep in their coffins. Out loud he asked, "I assume there's a schedule for the Vigil? Whose turn comes up next among the Council of Five?"

Mondragon seemed embarrassed. "Actually it was supposed to be me. Tomorrow night. But, well, this morning when I read the news about Bellot and realized Duclos' death wasn't the work of a random intruder, I traded places with Dr. Nivelle. He and Andre La Motte, the chartered accountant, are the remaining members of the Council. Nivelle's turn—mine now—doesn't come up until next month. I think La Motte's is in December."

Ganelon stood up and put out his cigarette. "All right, I'll speak to the police. Tomorrow night should be the murderer's last one on the loose." Ganelon shook Father Cesaire's hand. So did Mondragon. The Count and the detective walked out together. At the Abbey door Ganelon offered the man a ride home.

They drove through the dark wet streets in silence. At last Mondragon said, "I hope you don't think me an utter coward, trading places with Nivelle like that. We did understand the risk." When Ganelon made no answer Mondragon continued, "Remember the crash of the China Clipper in Manila Bay two months ago? Among the dead was the Grand Commander of the Knights returning from a tour of our Far Eastern leprosaria. In ten days the Commanders from all around the world will gather in Mondragon Castle in Rumania to elect a new Grand Commander."

Acknowledging Ganelon's sidelong glance, the Count said, "Yes, Mondragon Castle. My family has a long association with the Knights. Four hundred years ago one of my ancestors, Count Vacla, donated the castle to the order just before he and thirty brother

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Knights were burned at the stake for what the Church called the Transylvanian Vice—vampirism. That's the past Father Cesaire doesn't want raked up. One wing of Mondragon Castle is our world headquarters. The rest is an asylum for the violently insane.

"But to get back to what I was saying, there will be an election. It will be a close one. A certain 'morbid' element, let us call it, must not win. I must live to cast my vote. Dr. Nivelle appreciated that." Here the Count asked Ganelon to stop the car. "I always like to walk home through the park. The night air's a tonic," he said, stepping out onto the sidewalk.

Ganelon leaned across the front seat. "Suppose you died, who would become Commander here in San Sebastiano?"

"La Motte has seniority. After him, Dr. Nivelle." When Ganelon asked where he could find the doctor at that hour, Mondragon said, "If he isn't working in his laboratory at the Medical Research Center, he'll be studying in his apartment on the floor above. He never goes to bed until dawn. A regular nighthawk, our Nivelle."

Ganelon strummed his fingers on the steering wheel thoughtfully and watched Mondragon disappear into the park. Then he started the motor. But out of the corner of his eye he saw something flutter and looked back into the park. Something black. Like a cape. Or a giant bat. Smiling ruefully at his overheated imagination, Ganelon drove off to the Prefecture.

Assistant Chief Inspector Picardy, who had acquired a healthy paunch since his second marriage, rubbed his hands appreciatively over the business of the Vigil of Death. He fell in readily with Ganelon's plan. But then he insisted Ganelon join him for a late dinner at La Vacherie where the police congregated. As they ate, Picardy gave the detective a detailed rundown on the progress to date, including a whorl-by-whorl examination of the set of fingerprints found at both murder scenes, the strange broken mirror in the shape of a cross beside Duclos' coffin, and the similarity of the pick marks on the locks where entry was made.

The clocks were striking four in the morning when Ganelon reached the Medical Research Center, a down-at-the-heels, five-story building on the edge of the railway yard. The night porter led him up several staircases and down dark corridors to a laboratory.

Dr. Nivelle was a tall, stoop-shouldered figure with a high forehead and an indoor pallor. He looked up from a microscope to greet his visitor and led him into a small dingy office. Ganelon noted the mark on the wall behind the desk where a crucifix had hung and

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another mark by the clothes tree near the door that might have been made by a mirror.

Nivelle followed his eye and said, "Excuse how we look. Mondragon is finally getting around to painting the place. Well, at least his people have started taking things off the walls."

Ganelon took the offered chair. "The Count told me you agreed to trade places in the rotation. A fine gesture, everything considered."

"I mean to sleep with one eye open and a pistol at the ready," said the doctor firmly. Then he laughed at the bloodthirsty ring of his words. "Let's just say I owe Mondragon a lot. There's talk he's the favorite to be elected Grand Commander. And I can't think of a better choice."

Nivelle began wiping a small area of the desk top with a balled-up paper tissue, busying himself the way a speaker does when he wants to avoid the listener's eyes.

"Once a long time ago I dreamed of becoming a priest," he said. "But there was an impediment to my ordination: I am illegitimate. It runs in the family. Such rank injustice made me turn my back on religion. When I completed my scientific studies in Vienna I set sail for America from Trieste. Mondragon was among the passengers. We are both night people, so we saw quite a bit of each other. He sensed my bitterness and he drew me out. His own words went to the heart of my problem. At San Sebastiano I debarked to join the staff of the Medical Research Center. And later I joined the Knights." He looked up. "Well, now how can I help you?"

"I want to be here tonight when you make the Vigil," said Ganelon. "The police will be at Mondragon's in case our murderer doesn't know about the switch. I'm betting he will know. And I want to be here waiting for him."

"You're welcome, of course," said the doctor in a puzzled voice. "But what about La Motte? He should be doing the Vigil at this very moment."

"But his turn isn't until December."

"Didn't Mondragon tell you?" said Nivelle. "La Motte traded with a Knight going out of town on business."

Ganelon went dashing down corridors and staircases. He reached the Terrapin and raced across town through the predawn rain. A worried Madame La Motte, wearing a dressing gown and hair in rollers, was waiting at the curb at the address Nivelle had given him. Dr. Nivelle had phoned ahead. She told him what she'd told

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the doctor: her husband was spending the night in their summer place in suburban St. Privas on the other side of the city.

By the time Ganelon's speeding Terrapin passed through the city gate, the birds had begun the restless stirring that heralds the end of night. No, he would not be in time to save La Motte.

A car worked its way up the lane and turned in at the gate. An anxious Nivelle stepped from the car.

"Dead," announced Ganelon. "The police are on the way. How many knew that La Motte had traded?"

"Me. And Mondragon. That sort of thing has to be cleared with him. And Blanchet who wanted the switch. That's all." Then Nivelle said, "Hold it. There was a woman in my office when La Motte phoned. I couldn't fill in because I'd already switched with Mondragon. So La Motte said he'd take Blanchet's place himself. Maybe she overheard. Her name was Vladon."

"Why was she there?"

Nivelle shrugged. "A week or so back she and her grandfather paid me a visit. He was a crafty-eyed old talker smelling of garlic and with an interest in blood research. I summarized our work to date and we chatted a bit. On the way out I believe he made a modest donation to the cause. Then yesterday Miss Vladon returned alone. Her grandfather had disappeared, she said, and had he made contact with me again? I told her I couldn't think of any reason why he would."

Ganelon pulled on his upper lip. "What was La Motte's main job with the Knights?"

"He kept the books."

"Any talk of shortages?"

"No," said Nivelle. But his eyes seemed to deny the firmness of his answer.

Ganelon finished off his watery drink wondering if Mondragon had been tapping the till to pay off gambling debts. Would he arrange the killings to avoid a scandal that might cost him the Grand Commandership?

Two police cars pulled up in front of the house. When he had brought Picardy up to date, Ganelon called the Mondragon home. A servant informed him that the Count had not yet returned. It was five thirty in the morning. Time for Ganelon to go home and go to bed.

Noon found Ganelon fresh from sleep and drinking coffee in the

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dining room in his black silk dressing gown whose gold kiku symbol on the back proclaimed it a gift from the Mikado himself. If his father had still been alive, Ganelon wouldn't have dared come to the table unshaved.

Hortense, the housekeeper, appeared in the doorway with Miss Vladon. Unable to intimidate Ganelon the way she had his father, Hortense resorted to guerrilla tactics such as admitting people without warning. Ganelon poured Miss Vladon a cup of coffee and hoped he didn't look as bad as he felt.

"My grandfather just phoned," she said without touching the coffee. "Last night he heard the vampire's wolf pack howling. 'Now I've become the hunted,' he told me. 'But a good attack is the best defense.' " She shook her head in distress.

"When did he hear these wolves?"

"A few minutes after midnight," she said.

"Why did you go to see Dr. Nivelle?"

"To find Grandfather. To warn Nivelle to be careful. But I couldn't accuse my own grandfather in front of a stranger. Now I wish I had. Grandfather's going to strike again."

Ganelon drove beyond the city proper toward the St. Felix Escarpment which hemmed in the Principality to the north. The base of that sheer wall was riddled with abandoned mine shafts dating back to the beginning of the Nineteenth Century and the discovery of Europe's only nephrite jade deposit. The stone in La Motte's driveway had been the tip of a stalactite caught in Vladon's rooftop spare tire.

Some of the mine shafts were fitted with doors and used for bulk storage. Many stood open to tempt the homeless or the adventurous. But few were large enough to accommodate a truck caravan, and fewer close enough to the St. Felix zoo to hear the wolves howl as they had last night just after midnight in answer to a distant fire whistle.

On the surface it would seem that someone had set the dead men up to be murdered by old Vladon who believed them to be vampires. But Ganelon was aroused from a consideration of the loose ends that such an explanation provided by the appearance of old Vladon's truck caravan from the fog in the other lane. Ganelon spun the Terrapin around and followed the truck caravan back to town.

The old man parked on the rue Babbette and emerged with a black doctor's bag. Ganelon parked and hurried after him. Beneath a fog-bound street lamp, like a glowworm in amber, the man paused and

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then turned left. A mistake, surely. That street had nothing but florists and wholesale funeral suppliers and ended at the iron gate of the Mount Carmel cemetery. When the old man passed through the gate with a determined stride Ganelon followed. Vladon took the principal avenue between rows of headstones and decorative statuary—angels of death, mourning figures, and an *Agnus Dei*. Ganelon chose a minor but parallel path to keep the old man in sight.

At last Vladon shifted the black bag uneasily from one hand to the other as though debating some dark act. Abruptly he looked over his shoulder. Ganelon threw himself behind a column topped by a crying cherub. When the detective risked a glance, the old man had vanished into the fog.

Ganelon broke into a quiet sprint across the gravel. Fifty feet later he stopped in his tracks. There ahead of him stood a stone crypt in the peaked shape of a crusader's pavilion. The bronze door was set with stained glass and the name above the door read *Mondragon*.

Ganelon dashed for the crypt. Just as he reached the door it opened sharply outward. (San Sebastiano fire laws require the doors of public buildings and crypts to open outward.) The bronze door clubbed Ganelon solidly between the eyes which rolled upward as if to watch the fireworks display exploding inside his head. He was dimly aware of being knocked off his rubbery legs by a running figure.

Ganelon woke on the floor inside the crypt. Picardy and the medical examiner stood with their backs to him looking intently down into an open sarcophagus in which lay the body of Count Mondragon with a wooden stake through its heart.

Fearing a concussion, the medical examiner urged a few days in the hospital. By way of compromise Ganelon spent an hour resting at home. He lay on the couch in the living room, drinking Hortense's weak tea laced with his own strong Scotch. According to Picardy, someone brought the Count to the crypt a considerable time before he died, chloroformed and with a black cape over his head. They found the reeking cape in a corner of the crypt. Ganelon suspected once there, Mondragon had been injected with a longer-lasting sedative over the heart, right where the stake would later go.

Now the only one left alive was Dr. Nivelle. Did that make him the instigator of the murders or the next victim? If Mondragon was already lying in the crypt at the time of Ganelon's first meeting with Nivelle, the good doctor could have said, without fear of contradiction, that Mondragon knew about the La Motte switch. And

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if Nivelle knew that La Motte did his Vigil in his summer place at St. Privas he could have sent Ganelon on a crosstown wild-goose chase. All that remained to discover was the motive.

As if on cue there was a knock on the apartment door which Hortense had left open when he sent her out for the early afternoon newspapers. "May I come in?" asked Dr. Nivelle from beyond the threshold.

"The new Commander of the San Sebastiano chapter of the Knights of the Holy Vernicle is always welcome," said Ganelon.

The doctor came in and sat down, shaking his head sadly at the title. "A catastrophe for the Knights, Mondragon's death. And I've lost a good friend." Then he said, "I heard you'd been hurt. What about tonight?"

"Tonight?"

"The Vigil," the doctor reminded him. "I switched with Mondragon, remember? You wanted to be there. But I can see—"

"No, I'm fine," said Ganelon, swinging his feet onto the floor and sitting up. His head and stomach reeled, but he couldn't lie around all day. "What's the time?"

"Two thirty."

Another knock announced Father Cesaire. "Just in the neighborhood to console the Mondragons," said the priest. "Thought I'd see how you are. A fine family, the Mondragons, eh, Dr. Nivelle? They certainly helped the Count win his battle with compulsive gambling a few years back. A tragic loss for the Knights, all this."

"So I've been saying, Father," agreed Nivelle. "But now I must go." He turned back at the open door. "Oh, yes, one more thing: Miss Vladon's been lurking outside the Center. I can't say why. Thought you'd like to know."

"Look for me sometime before dusk," said Ganelon. When Nivelle left the detective added, "Actually I'm after the grandfather. And I'm betting he's run back to his hole." Then he said, "By the way, with Nivelle the Commander here I suppose he'll direct more money into blood research."

Father Cesaire shook his head. "No, the High Council determines all that, which in the last resort means the Grand Commander himself."

Here Ganelon thought he heard a light footstep on the stair. But perhaps he was mistaken. He looked back at the priest. "How was that again?"

"To avoid confiscation of religious property during the upheavals

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following the Reformation, my order and the Knights made over everything to the Grand Commander. A kind of legal fiction, if you will."

"You mean legally all your order's property here and around the world and the Knights' asylums, hospitals, and leprosaria, all are the personal property of the Grand Commander whose election Mondragon wanted to prevent?"

Father Cesaire looked about him and lowered his voice. "For all his jokes, his fine tenor singing voice, and his story-telling bonhammie, Mondragon believed the Commander from Ireland to be something less than a pillar of philanthropy."

After-fog gripped city traffic. Inside the crawling Terrapin, Ganelon was clear-headed and almost smiling. Nothing like the presence of a Fong in a case to concentrate a Ganelon's mental powers. This time the Irish branch of that villainous family had come up with the most sinister fruit. And Sean Fong blamed Ganelon for the terrible death of his beautiful younger sister, Lady Emerald Fong, chopped into small bits by the propellors of a runaway speed boat. Unless Ganelon prevented it, extensive holdings dedicated to the good of man would become the personal property of a criminal genius with a hatred for humankind honed fine by a long pedigree of evil.

To destroy good was always reason enough for the Fongs. But here a fortune could be turned as well. Ganelon knew the particular pleasure Fong would take in erecting a skyscraping eyesore on the site of the Abbey of the Holy Vernicle and driving the holy Abbot and his monks out into the streets to beg for their bread.

Traffic thinned beyond the city gate. Ganelon turned the Terrapin northward and soon reached the St. Felix Escarpment. He found the mine shaft, weeds broken down before the entrance. Holding his famous pearl-handled Hrosco nine-millimeter automatic in one hand and a pocket flashlight in the other, Ganelon stepped out of the fog and into the darkness. Stalactites dangled above him. After fifty yards and beyond a sharp bend Ganelon came face to face with the truck caravan parked beside a small wood fire, its windows dark.

Ganelon mounted the back steps and knocked. Then he pocketed his pistol, stepped inside, and played his flashlight around the room. A wooden table and two chairs stood beneath a festoon of garlic heads. Shelves held dishes. A black cape hung from a peg. A high-sided bunk bed occupied the far wall. In the lower bunk lay an old

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mustached figure with something protruding straight up from the fist on his chest.

Ganelon cursed and stepped forward. As he did so, the old man sat bolt upright and gave a loud roar. He had a cross made from a mirror in his fist. It dashed the glare of the flashlight back into the detective's eyes.

"Who the blazes are you?" demanded the old man, swinging his bare feet over the side and letting them find their way into slippers. "No vampire, for sure. Neither cross nor garlic bothers you. A burglar, then?"

"I knocked," said Ganelon.

"A burglar might," insisted the old man. "But did you know the Undead cannot enter a man's house without being invited? No, I didn't think you knew that. Vampire lore is ancient and deep." The old man shuffled over to a kerosene lamp and lit it to observe the detective more closely. "What are you doing here?"

"Your granddaughter hired me to find you. It would be better all around if you came with me to the police."

"In my country vampire killing is no crime and a hunter such as myself is something of a popular hero," said the old man, gesturing Ganelon into a chair. He took a brandy bottle from a shelf, forked two tumblers with his fingers, and sat down on the other side of the table. "A rigorous life. We walk the night streets, suspecting all we see. We hunt and sometimes we become the hunted." The old man smiled slyly. "No doubt my granddaughter told you what brought us here. What do you think I found on the northeast corner where the rue des Marchands de Vin crosses the rue de Begat?"

"A telephone booth."

"Correct," admitted the old man grudgingly. "At the appointed hour the phone rang and a man's voice describing himself as an astrologer and a fellow-enemy of the Undead whispered my name. He had discovered a nest of vampires in your fair city, and cast the horoscopes of the damnable creatures to determine the day they were most vulnerable to the Stake of Deliverance. Now he needed my help, the local vampire killer being an adherent of a rival astrologer.

"He offered me the name of the man who had arrived here on the S. S. Almaviva with the coffin. I was to visit him and judge for myself if he was one of the Undead. Then if I promised to kill each man on the dates he prescribed, he would give me the other names.

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Well, Dr. Nivelle was a vampire. Did you know vampires are the illegitimate spawn of illegitimate parents; no, I thought not.

"When the whisperer called again, he gave me the names. And the dates for the first two. Duclos was to die the very next day. Dawn is best, when they return home to their hideous beds, all weary and bloated with stolen blood. To tell you the truth, I'd never driven a stake through anything but a corpse before. I found a café to fortify myself." The old man toasted Ganelon with his glass. "Coming back an hour before dawn, I turned a corner to see my granddaughter hurrying out of here with a mallet and stake under her coat. 'What have we here?' thought I." He laughed darkly. "But I drove off. I wanted the grisly business behind me. I had spare mallets and stakes.

"As promised, Duclos' outside door was open. I mounted to the attic where I'd been told the coffin would be. Trembling like a coward I drew my mirror-cross to protect me, should that creature wake. But Duclos was already dead in his coffin with a stake through his heart. Oh, I understood at once and in my horror I dropped the cross. My granddaughter knew I was a drunken old coward and finding my notebook here on this very table, with all the names and the first two dates, she set out to avenge her father and her mother herself.

"I ran from the house. My whisperer and I had already arranged that I was to hide here after I killed Duclos. I meant to pick up Maritza on the way. But I couldn't. I don't know why. Shame? Horror at what she had shown herself capable of? Anyway, that next afternoon at three I waited by the phone in the café just down the road. Duclos was already dead when I arrived—that's all I told him. He muttered a curse about the other vampire killer and the rival astrologer. Next time he said we'd do better.

"I knew I'd have to kill to redeem myself in Maritza's eyes and share in the revenge she was extracting. But she beat me to Bellot, and somehow she found out about La Motte and Mondragon. But I'm striking at dusk this time before the beast awakes to invade the night!"

The old man pulled open a drawer in the table and brandished a mallet and a stake. "Here's Dr. Valentin Nivelle's cure for the terminal disease of the blood!" he said through clenched teeth.

The mad edge on the old voice made Ganelon choke on his drink. Pretending to reach for a handkerchief, he leaned back in his chair and went for his Hrosco. But the old man stretched a foot under the table and pushed over the detective's chair, sending him toppling

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backward. Ganelon hit his damaged head on the wall and passed out from pain. He came to tied hand and foot and lying in the lower bunk with a gag in his mouth.

The old man was leaning over him. "You think me a fool," he said, slipping the brandy bottle into his pocket. "But I know on good authority that you are Nivelle's bodyguard. Well, tonight he will have use for one. Farewell."

Ganelon was still admiring the excellent workmanship of the old man's knots as the truck caravan crept out of the mine shaft. By the time it reached the roadway the helpless Ganelon was staring into the darkness and pondering this amazing case. Sean Fong wouldn't dare to make a San Sebastiano trip himself. But if Maritza Vladon was doing his dirty work for him, then who was the whisperer on the phone? Who set up Nivelle to look like a vampire and why? Or was it Nivelle himself? But why would a man pretend to a vampire killer that he was a vampire?

The one explanation to this question drew a Ganelon curse. Bait. A trap. He was still tussling with the knots when the truck caravan came to a stop in the city. The cab door closed and heavy-soled shoes hurried away.

A minute later an oblong of gray light fell across the bunk where Ganelon lay. He recognized the shadow of Maritza Vladon in the doorway. Then it moved out of the light. A drawer opened. When Maritza reappeared she held a mallet-shaped object in one hand and something long and pointed in the other. Ganelon froze. She approached the bunk. The mallet rose, descended, and became a large flashlight glaring into Ganelon's eyes. She gave a relieved cry and started work with a butcher knife on the ropes around his wrists.

"You were so still I thought Grandfather had killed you, too," she said. "He's going to kill Nivelle. He pushed me aside, told me to tend to you, and took off running."

Ganelon's hands were free. He pulled out the gag. "It's a trap. Nivelle will kill him first," he said hoarsely, taking the knife and working on the ankle ropes. "That forged bill of lading wasn't to get your grandfather here to kill anyone. The good doctor could handle that himself and did. Four times. But without your grandfather here, Nivelle ends up the prime suspect. Now when the authorities find your grandfather dead and connect his fingerprints with the other deaths, they'll say it was self-defense for Nivelle and be glad to close the file on the Council of Five murders."

"Council of what?"

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Ganelon jumped from the bunk. "Later."

They ran from the truck caravan. "He went in here," said Maritza, leading Ganelon down a street to a boarded-up old apartment building. The detective forced the front door far enough for them to slip inside. The pocket flashlight guided them past the trash and wreckage on the staircases. At a turning on the fifth flight an open window led down to the roof next door. The trail took them across three more roofs, up over a parapet, and onto the top of the Medical Research Center.

The door down into the building was open. Beside it an empty brandy bottle marked the spot where Vladon had stopped to drink some courage. Ganelon hoped the old man had lingered over the drink.

The first door in the stairwell stood ajar. Ganelon drew his Hrosco and stepped into Dr. Nivelle's apartment. They found the coffin in the living room beneath the fluttering curtains of an open window. Maritza's scream made the old man spin around, mallet raised, stake poised. At that precise moment Nivelle snapped his eyes open and fired the pistol hidden in the folds of his shroud. The bullet struck the ceiling.

Nivelle sat up in the shower of plaster to fire again. But he saw Ganelon and lunged sideways to avoid the shot from the Hrosco, capsizing the coffin and sawhorses onto the floor. Ganelon kicked Nivelle's pistol into a far corner and pulled the man up by his shroud at the throat. "And what did Fong promise you for getting him the Grand Commandership? That was your motive, wasn't it?"

Ganelon never knew why but in these nose-to-nose moments the criminal invariably became talkative, revealing things otherwise taken to the grave. And so it was here. Struggling to break Ganelon's grip, Nivelle muttered, "Years of money wasted on soup kitchens and insane asylums, money stolen from my blood research. Fong promised we'd end that foolishness."

Satisfied, Ganelon hurled Nivelle backward across the floor and onto the sofa beside the open window. He started around to see to Vladon when the old vampire hunter shouted a warning. Ganelon swung back to catch a glimpse of black as Nivelle vanished through the window curtains. The railway yard below was invisible in the fog. But no one could have survived that fall.

Ganelon pulled his head back into the room. "There's a ledge out there. Maybe he was trying to escape. Maybe it was suicide. Fong

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doesn't like failure and prison walls are no protection against his displeasure."

"Nivelle didn't jump or fall," said old Vladon, his voice shaking with fear. "I saw him turn into a giant bat in midair and fly away."

Ganelon had given Maritza a pitying glance, knowing the police would find the body in the railway yard. When they did not, Ganelon accepted Picardy's explanation that the body had fallen into an open coal car and now lay buried in the hard darkness of some tramp steamer's coal bunker.

But sometimes at night, when a breeze touched Ganelon's cheek like the wake of a bat's wing, the detective would give a start and remember what old Vladon answered when told about the Vigil of Death: "You say these Knights of yours sleep in coffins? What better men for a vampire to hide among?"

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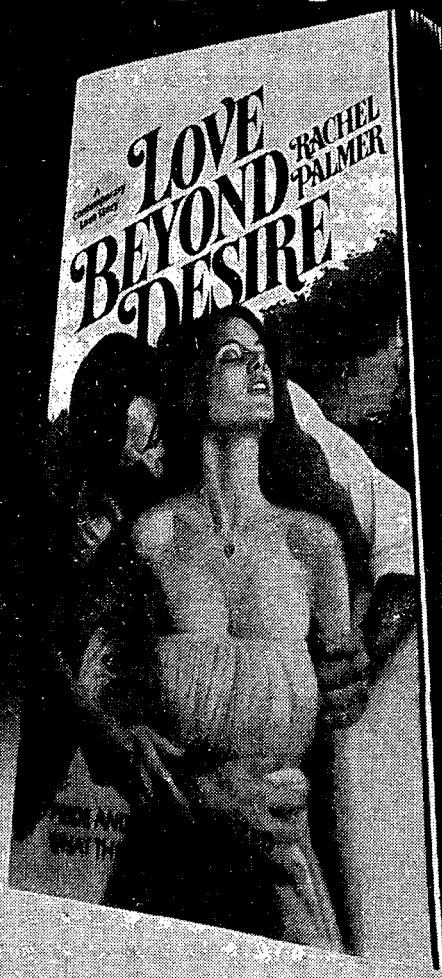
What made Marge burn the toast and miss her favorite soap opera?



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Colman was Father all over again, Beth said. But Beth was always chasing rainbows, haring off after a pot of gold. She was being seduced by the doctor's talk of marital freedom . . .

WHERE WERE YOU, MAMIE?

by MARY AMLAW

I never wanted to kill him. Not at the moment when I realized he must die; not while I was planning how to do it; and not now that I was seeing him for the first time. He was as handsome and kind as my sister Beth had told me. The warmth of his brown eyes taking me in with such concern, and the compassion that seemed to flow from him, almost undid my resolve.

He had to die. The things he was doing to poor Beth made his death necessary. And it must be tonight, while Beth was on a weekend trip with her art class and not around to notice my absence and ask, "Where were you, Mamie, at 8 P.M. on Friday when Dr. Nicholson was killed?"

"Mrs. Steven? Amy Steven?" He held the door open for me to enter. Beth had told me his secretary didn't work Fridays and we were alone in his office. His glance was at once observant and welcoming. I felt as if my undistinguished features had been instantly memorized, from graying hair to the scar on my wrist, memento of a childhood fall.

A sudden clamor at odds with my carefully controlled expression seemed to spring from deep inside me. Care about me! Help me! And somewhere deeper still, more despairing, Oh, why doesn't anyone love me?

He gestured me in, but it was a moment before I could move. How had his look aroused that cry within me? I had thought myself stolid, phlegmatic, well adjusted to life. I'd had all the love I needed from Father and Mother and Beth. And what business had graying spinsters to be crying for love?

He was a dangerous man, this Doctor Nicholson, with his warm

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voice and sympathetic brown eyes. I couldn't let my emotions take me off-guard. I must concentrate on the business at hand.

He was of average height and slight of build. That was good. I was only average weight myself. The strong sharp hatpin gleamed in the navy-blue grosgrain band as I removed my hat.

"Now, Mrs. Steven—"

"Miss." I corrected him unexpectedly as he seated himself in an armchair opposite mine. There was a couch with a pillow at its head—two couches, in fact—but I preferred a chair.

"Miss," the doctor echoed. His sad little smile seemed to comment on the fearful creature I'd been, shying away from men while dreaming of the shining knight who, like Sleeping Beauty's prince, would conquer the hedge of fears that enclosed me.

Yes, I knew my life had been circumscribed and dictated by fear. Beth had pointed it out to me, along with the suggestion that I too might find therapy as useful as she did.

The doctor's attitude of intent concern made me want to talk to him, but what folly that would be. My plans called to dispose of him, not confide in him, and, once I'd killed him, to disappear.

Of course the police would question his patients. But this would be my one and only visit, and Amy Steven wasn't my name. I'd borrowed the address of an A. L. Steven in the Boston directory. I'd chosen Amy because it sounded like Mamie, my real name, and Steven because my mother had intended it for the son she never had, the brother lost to me.

It had also been my father's name.

"Miss," the doctor repeated. His eyes grew more intent, as if he could see that thorny hedge woven in my youth. He steepled his fingers, as if searching for the best place to attack. The gesture reminded me of Father, sitting in silence at the kitchen table, his eyes on the clock, his fingers steepled in disapproval when I scurried in five minutes late to get his supper ready.

Father had lived by the clock. Breakfast at seven, lunch promptly at noon, dinner at five-thirty sharp, bedtime at nine. Every day. For all four of us. No exceptions for birthdays or holidays. Winter and summer, in school and out, every day followed the same unbreakable schedule.

For a moment I felt the doctor's steepled fingers as criticism. The hatpin gleamed against the grosgrain. I touched it and felt more secure.

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"Would you like to discuss your problem?" he asked in the most inviting way.

How could I tell him *he* was my problem? To kill him and escape undetected. To my horror I felt myself wanting to shout: *Why are you destroying our lives? Everything was fine until you began seducing Beth to your way of thinking*! But I bit my tongue. If he learned I was the sister of one of his patients, he had only to discover that patient's name and my anonymity would be gone.

"When you phoned for an appointment you said you were suicidal," he reminded me.

I'd had to say something striking to have him see me on such short notice. I wasn't suicidal. Not now. For a brief time after Mother's death when I was alone with Father and found him impossible to please, yes. And after he drove Henry away—dear shy Henry—then too. But not now.

For a moment I wanted to talk to the doctor. Maybe he could untangle Father's rage and my inability to fight for Henry.

Silly! What did that matter now? My life was settled very much to my liking and I meant to keep it that way. Old griefs could just stay buried.

"Perhaps it would help if I tell you what I see." The warmth of his voice encompassed and soothed me, as if he were rocking me in his arms. I felt my hands flutter helplessly.

"I see a woman in her prime who shuffles like an invalid," he said. "I see her in a formless dress much too big for her. I see trim ankles disguised by ugly shoes. I see a face that could be attractive dulled to lifelessness. In short, I see a dispirited woman denying her sexuality, a woman who, like a scared little girl, sits on the edge of her chair with her hands folded neatly over the hat in her lap."

Scared? Yes, I was scared. I'd never killed anyone before.

With all his clever observations, I wondered, how had he missed the significance of the hatpin?

"*Are* you a scared little girl?" he asked softly. His smile promised support for me. I blinked back sudden tears as the cry, Love me! rose in me again.

Was I so in need of kindness and understanding that the mere hint of it roused that childish plea? I pulled the hat more securely toward me and stroked it. It was new, bought especially for the occasion, and wonderfully face-obscuring with its wide brim and dark veil. Beth hadn't seen it. She never would.

My Beth! Ten years my junior, she had been more my baby than

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my sister. Yes, think of Beth the day I first noticed how she was changing. Beth, still beautiful at thirty-five with her golden hair and pink-and-white skin. Beth, bounding in from an art class looking like a teenager in her tank top and beige pants.

"Mamie, you should have *seen* today's model! What a hunk of man!" She spun me in a mad little dance. "What a build, what a body! Sexy, sexy, sexy!"

I recoiled even from the memory. It was shameless for a decent married woman to be talking of such things!

Beth chided me. "No, it's not shameless. It's wonderful. Dr. Nicholson is freeing me to deal with these things. Things we should both have explored when we were adolescents, Mamie."

There are some things left better undiscovered. My parents had raised me to be a lady, and after Mother died I'd done my best to instill her standards into Beth. But the doctor was proving to have far more influence on her than I, and Beth's downhill journey was evidence that his moral conscience was deplorable.

He inclined slightly toward me, expecting an answer to his question, the appeal of his warm comforting gaze arousing emotional rumblings that were deflecting me from my purpose. "I'm not here to talk about things that happened when I was a little girl," I said testily.

He nodded, accepting my response. "But the past affects the present," he reminded me gently.

An image of Father in his wide-lapeled gray suit, his narrow eyes distant behind thick glasses, his silence a constant accusation, made me want to hurl cries of rage and pain long buried. I stifled a traitorous impulse to speak of him—to talk of Mother, always warmhearted and laughing until Father turned his cold silent eyes her way.

They were dead. Beth was all I had left, and I couldn't stand by and watch the doctor's immorality destroy her life.

Several weeks after Beth shocked me with her crude remarks about the art-class model, she came downstairs to my apartment, sat on my bed, and announced, "I'm thinking of divorcing Colman."

The doctor's influence, of course. Beth had an ideal life. Colman Caldwell, her husband, was a steady, hard-working engineer. His labor had provided Beth with a suburban split-level that had now become my home as well as hers, a Cadillac, and a closet full of clothes. She was free to do what she liked all day until 6 P.M., when

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he expected his dinner. She had married right after high school graduation and had wanted for nothing.

"Don't talk nonsense, Beth," I'd told her. "You have a good husband and a good life. You're chasing rainbows."

To my horror, her eyes filled with tears. "You can't imagine how unhappy I am. I've tried to make this marriage work for seventeen years. And I can't. It's destroying me!"

As I stared at her, uncomprehending, she added in a small voice, "Colman is Father all over again."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing—I'd envied Beth her comfortable life for so long! "But you seemed so in love when you married him."

"I was in love," Beth agreed. "With a fantasy. I thought Colman was strong, protective, loving. Over the years I've been forced to admit he's a cold, noncommunicative, totally selfish man. Just like Father."

Frustration flowed from her. Colman was still a stranger to her—he never shared his thoughts or feelings. He provided her with the things *he* wanted. Anything she wanted, the answer was always no. No, they couldn't afford a second car, even a used one. No, they couldn't rent a summer place. No, Beth couldn't change the tile in the bathroom. No, she couldn't have the yard fenced in. No, they couldn't have children.

"Everything is no, no, no!" Beth cried. "It's Father all over again, and I can't stand it!"

"Father could be difficult," I admitted, not knowing how to deal with her.

"Doctor Nicholson's helped me see that I married a man like Father precisely because I didn't know how to make Father love me. But I've grown beyond being trapped in childhood rejection and guilt. I'm becoming free to love, Mamie, to love a real man, a warm communicating man."

A man like Henry, I thought. My first shy suitor. We shared a cup of cocoa after school one day. When Father came home his supper wasn't ready. He never said a word—in a cold temper he flung all the dishes against the walls, hurled the glasses into splinters, threw all the canned goods on the kitchen floor, and banged the cupboard doors so hard they wouldn't close properly.

He never—then or later—said a single word to me against having boy friends but I knew he expected me to stay home and take care

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of him forever. He didn't have to say it. And I, driven by fearful needs I couldn't understand, collaborated in my own living death.

"Taking over the household when Mother died was your way of getting Father's approval," Beth said. "And I guess it worked for you. Marrying Colman was my way. But it isn't working for me."

"But divorce!" I protested. "It's against everything we were brought up to believe. Maybe if you became pregnant—"

"Colman never wanted children," Beth said. "And even if he should change his mind I can't get pregnant all by myself, Mamie." She gave me a rueful smile. "That part of our marriage has been dead for a long time."

The key turned in the front door. It was six o'clock.

"There, he's home," Beth said. "And I haven't even started supper. Remember the way Father used to sit at the bare table and just wait for dinner to appear without saying a word? Colman does the same thing."

"Beth, if getting dinner on time is such a chore for you I wouldn't mind doing it. I'm used to cooking, after all." I would do anything to still this talk about divorce.

We could hear Colman cross the kitchen floor overhead, make himself a drink, and sit at the table.

"I feel like a tiny daisy whose petals have been picked off one by one," Beth whispered. "Only the stem is left. If that's crushed too, I'll never revive." Looking at her, she reminded me eerily of Mother, who had gone into a peculiar depression that lasted the three final years of her life. I remembered her shuffling about the house in a housecoat, eating ice cream out of cardboard containers, and staring hour after hour at soap operas.

"Beth, dear, go and lie down. I'll tell Colman you're not feeling well."

She brightened a little. "Mamie, would you? I just can't face another night of silent condemnation." Then she innocently added the words that made me understand what was really happening. "Especially," she said dreamily, "after being with Doctor Nicholson."

"Why, Beth! I do believe you have a crush on him."

She blushed. "Every woman falls in love with her doctor. But, Mamie, he's so kind, so caring. He's the most marvelous man I've ever met."

My memories of fat, gruff Dr. McMorrow, our childhood physician, inspired no such rhapsodies.

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"He's *so* handsome," Beth continued in a daydreaming voice. "He has beautiful dark eyes and thick wavy hair. And his voice—"

She was in love, and Colman was suffering in comparison with her wonderful beloved. I felt uneasy. Beth had been impulsive growing up. More than once she had hared off after a pot of gold only to fall off the rainbow. If she divorced Colman, what life would she have? Even if the doctor returned her love—and I felt instinctively that he didn't—Beth's sense of guilt, so akin to mine, would eventually destroy her.

Colman did remind me most unfortunately of Father. He harumphed when I appeared and went back to reading his paper. He had set a knife and a fork on the table to await the nonexistent dinner.

"Beth isn't feeling well," I apologized. "She's sleeping. I'll get dinner tonight."

He looked pointedly at his watch and said nothing. Father wouldn't have responded either. When I finally set a meal before him, I was glad to escape to my own apartment. The proverb is wrong. Silence isn't always golden.

In an effort to make Beth more content with her marriage, I tried to talk up Colman's good qualities.

It didn't help. She began seeing the doctor three times a week. After each visit she babbled happily about him and about her own growing strength. "Colman doesn't want me to go to Lake Champlain with the art class," she confided. "Just two years ago his disapproval would have settled it. But not now." Her eyes sparkled in her rosy face. "I'm strong enough to take his disapproval now. I'm going on that trip come hell or high water!"

I was cooking dinner now as a matter of course. Beth stayed out more and more frequently, involved with her art classes and her visits to Nicholson. Colman showed his disapproval in silent ways. He began taking the car every day, leaving Beth without transportation. He turned up the volume on the TV until it was deafening. Asking him to turn it down would only achieve the opposite, we knew, remembering Father, who forbad us even to enter the living-room when he was watching TV.

Beth, growing brazen, simply stayed out later and later. She began charging new clothes recklessly.

The Monday of the week her trip to Lake Champlain was scheduled Colman refused to give her any housekeeping money. "He's

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punishing me for using the charge cards," Beth explained, "and for being my own person instead of his passive servant. Thank God for Doctor Nicholson—he's taught me not to let Colman manipulate me any more."

When her marriage broke up, I wondered, would the good doctor assume her care? I thought not.

If Colman was truly trying to keep Beth home, his tactics failed. She left the house early that Monday and returned so late that I didn't see her until late Tuesday afternoon when she burst into my apartment, her face glowing with excitement.

"Divorce ho!" she announced happily. "I've taken the first real step toward freedom! I've got a job working for the Art Association. Tonight at dinner I'm telling Colman it's all over."

She couldn't imagine the misery she was letting herself in for. "Beth, no!" I said. "You can't! You don't know what the world is like for a woman alone! You have no job skills, no experience—just having to keep to a schedule, with someone standing over your shoulder wanting to know why you aren't at your desk if you return two minutes late from a coffee break—how long could you stand it?"

I heard my voice rising hysterically. After Father died, I'd fought a losing battle with the workaday world. Oh, there were jobs available, even to a woman of forty-two with no prior work experience. Waitressing, for instance. I did my best, my legs and feet aching so badly by the time each stint was over that I could barely make it home. I was accurate and responsible, I never made a mistake on an order or spilled anything on a customer, but I wasn't fast enough to make good tips—and ultimately not fast enough to suit my boss.

After that I took a typing course and hired out to a temporary office-help agency. I worked in holes, facing blank walls, doing the garbage the regular employees wouldn't touch—no holidays, no fringe benefits, no sick leave. Then my rent doubled and I could no longer afford the job. Beth's offer to come live with her saved my life.

Beth shrugged off my warning. "You did all right, Mamie, and you're ten years older than I am."

I shook my head. "If you and Colman hadn't made room for me here I don't know how I would have survived." I loved my cozy, rent-free apartment on the ground floor of Beth's house, my own private entrance. Beth took shelter for granted. To me, it was still a miracle. The interest from the sale of our parents' house, now that I had free

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shelter, was enough to supply my meager needs. But if Beth divorced Colman—

"He'd never let you keep this house," I told her. Oh, but I was afraid for her! She was impulsive and impractical, happy-go-lucky and improvident. I had to keep her from ruining her life.

Even while I was trying to find an argument that would persuade her, her eyes took on that love-lost mistiness.

"Doctor Nicholson will be so pleased when I tell him!" she murmured. "He's been leading me into making my own decisions for such a long time. Wait till he hears. Mamie, I'm so lucky to have such a wonderful person to lean on."

That's when I realized the doctor must die. If he was dead and no longer able to influence Beth, she'd forget these unsettling notions. She was being seduced by his talk of marital freedom.

"Just do me one favor, Beth," I said. She was still thinking of the doctor and nodded absently. "Don't tell Colman tonight. Wait until after your trip this weekend. I'd rather not be alone with him after he learns you plan to divorce him."

She looked at me. "All right," she said.

Looking back at her, I tried one last time to preserve the status quo. "Are you really sure you want a divorce?"

"Mamie, try to understand. Colman and I don't have a marriage. He doesn't love me or want to share his life with me. He's simply clinging to me to provide his creature comforts, just as Father clung to Mother. I'm only a convenience for him. It's time I lived my own life."

I set dinner out precisely at 6 P.M. and left Beth and Colman to their usual spooky silence. The following day Beth headed for Lake Champlain and I kept my appointment with the doctor.

Killing him was going to be harder than I'd thought. He was so charming and sympathetic I almost took Beth's advice to engage him as a therapist. His reassuring presence began to undercut my long-held distance from men. Something very deep yearned to put aside my thorny defenses at last. But with a great effort I squashed it. Remember Beth, so impulsively eager to destroy her comfortable life at this man's urging.

"I would like to ask you a question, Doctor," I said. "Would you ever marry a female patient who fell in love with you?"

I was giving him his chance for life. He inclined his head, his eyes mild and gentle. "Are you speaking of yourself?"

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"A hypothetical question." I fingered the hatpin.

"I would not marry a patient," he said. "If a patient becomes so involved, therapy cannot continue. I would recommend the patient to another therapist." He smiled at me. "Does that answer your question?"

Oh, he was devilish! He had talked Beth into leaving Colman, letting her think he loved her, and all the while he had no intention of marrying her! She would come to him like a happy child, reporting that her marriage was dissolved and they could now marry, and he would pretend astonishment and suggest another therapist. Oh, my poor naive Beth!

"I think we should explore your suicidal attraction," the doctor said.

"Oh, it's passed now," I said. To my surprise, I felt a strange interior jolting—a sense that I, like Father, lived by the clock to hold those subliminally destructive ideas at bay.

—Father had himself died a suicide, a cowardly one, with alcohol and barbiturates. His death had been a final rejection of me, a denial of all my striving for his loving attention— . . .

Love me! Love me! That insistent clamor rose again. Doctor Nicholson looked at me as if he heard that silent cry. More, something about him suggested a willingness to answer it.

"I'll call and make another appointment." I told him, rising hastily. "I'm feeling quite well and strong now, thank you, Doctor." I took the hatpin out of the band and placed the hat on my head.

"If you feel at all suicidal, I want you to call me, day or night," he said, giving me a number. I was surprised that anyone cared that much about another human being. He walked me to the door and held it open for me to pass through. I shook hands with him, then took the hatpin in my right hand as if to fasten my hat.

At the last minute I faltered. If only I dared talk to him of Father's coldness, of his sudden outbursts of violence—

Impossible. I had come here to free Beth before she destroyed her life at this man's direction. As he stood gallantly holding the door for me, I concentrated on a spot a little under and to the left of his breastbone and with a shuddering feeling of immense sadness I plunged the hatpin in.

It must have found the heart at once, for he crumpled at my feet, a look of surprise on his face. Then, as I watched, the surprised look faded into a semblance of peace. I wrapped the hatpin carefully in tissue and dropped it in a litter box near the subway entrance . . .

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When Beth returned from Lake Champlain, I showed her the newspaper account of the doctor's unexplained murder. She wept, of course, and I consoled her. After the police questioned her I consoled her again while she spoke of him with tears. I listened patiently. Soon she would recover and life would go on in its accustomed safe pattern.

Today, when I returned from shopping, I found a note on my kitchen table:

> "Mamie, dear. Colman refuses to divorce me. I'm leaving him anyway. Without Doctor Nicholson to talk to I can't bear this marriage another moment. I'll be in touch. Love, Beth."

I sank down on my bed, my heart hammering. Beth had gone!

While I tried to understand, Colman knocked on my door. How like Father he was, so dark and glowering! I trembled, afraid of his anger, afraid he had guessed my part and would report me to the police. But all he said was, "It's six o'clock." And he went upstairs and sat at the kitchen table.

After a moment, I followed him.

He wanted his dinner, of course. I was back with Father again, a despairing house servant for a silently critical man. Always hoping for approval and finding only condemnation. My punishment.

I had thought I was killing Beth's destroyer. I was wrong.

I had killed my savior.

DETECTIVERSE

ROSA BY ANY OTHER NAME

by DENNIS MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN

Underneath this pile of stones
Lie the bones of Mary Jones.
Her name isn't really Jones,
But stones don't rhyme with Lopez.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

MYSTERY MAGAZINES: Readers of this column obviously don't need convincing as to the pleasures of the mystery magazine. Now, for fans and researchers alike, comes a fat new volume, *Monthly Murders,* compiled by Michael L. Cook, which lists all fiction published in American and British digest-size mystery magazines from 1941 to 1980. *EQMM* was the first of these, of course, and it's included along with *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and more than a hundred others—from *Accused Detective Story* to *Weird Terror Tales.* The book, over 1,100 pages long, gives a brief publishing history of each magazine followed by a chronological list of each issue's contents. An author index at the back, complete with pseudonyms, lists all stories published by each writer. Cook has done a thorough and fascinating job of producing a volume long needed by libraries, researchers, and fans. It's available at $49.95 from Greenwood Press, P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881.

This year has been a time of turmoil for the few surviving mystery magazines. In England the quarterly *London Mystery Selection* ceased publication after 132 issues. And on this side of the Atlantic there were radical changes in three publications. The Canadian *Black Cat* (March Chase Publishing, 45 Southport St., Toronto M6S 3N5) went from bimonthly to quarterly publication, but increased the length of each issue to 88 pages. *Mystery* (411 N. Central, Glendale, CA 91203) changed from a large format to 96-page digest size but is maintaining its bimonthly publication schedule. *Skullduggery* ceased publication but was immediately replaced by *Spiderweb* (Corsair Press, Drawer F, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, MA 02139), a 76-page quarterly under the same editorship. Let's hope all three survive and flourish.

FIVE QUEENS: Avenel Suspense Classics, a hardcover omnibus series distributed by Crown Publishers, has thus far published two collections of Agatha Christie novels plus single volumes devoted to Arthur Conan Doyle, Erle Stanley Gardner, Dashiell Hammett, and Earl Derr Big-

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gers. The latest addition is *Ellery Queen: Five Complete Novels,* containing *And On the Eighth Day, The Player on the Other Side, Inspector Queen's Own Case, Cat of Many Tails,* and *Double, Double.* Four are undoubted classics, and if one might wish for a different Wrightsville novel in place of *Double, Double,* this is still the best single-volume edition of Queen ever published. At $6.98 it's a bargain that's hard to equal.

PRIZE WINNER: Charles Scribner's Sons has announced the first winner of its newly established Crime Novel Award. The $7,500 prize, for the best first mystery novel, goes to Carol Clemeau Esler for *The Ariadne Clue.* Set at a southern university, the book deals with the disappearance and murder of a woman graduate student of Greek ancestry. The heroine, a professor of classics, solves the mystery through her knowledge of Greek literature. The author teaches classics at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, and she'll see her award-winning novel published by Scribners this fall. Paperback rights have already been sold to Ballantine Books.

LONDON CRIMES: An unusual trade paperback is the recently published *London Crimes* by Charles Dickens ($8.95). Edited by Nadya Aisenberg, the book collects a half dozen stories by Dickens about the London police and underworld, together with items by W. H. Wills and Thomas Waters, mainly from *Household Words,* 1850–51. The book reveals for the first time (to my knowledge) that three chapters of Waters's *Recollections of a Policeman* were taken—plagiarized?—from these pieces by Dickens. *London Crimes* is the first volume in the Periwig Mystery Series, published by Rowan Tree Press, 124 Chestnut Street, Boston, MA 02108.

MODUS OPERANDI: One of the most enjoyable recent commentaries on detective fiction is Robin W. Winks's *Modus Operandi,* a 131-page hardcover book recently published by David R. Godine, Boston ($12.50). Winks views the field with a scholar's appreciative eye, and though I wish he'd been kinder to John Dickson Carr's novels, on the whole I found the book both stimulating and thought-provoking.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Gertrude Stein's sole detective novel, *Blood on the Dining Room Floor,* previously published only in a 1948 limited edition, will be reprinted in the late summer by Creative Arts Book Company, Berkeley, California. The new edition has an informative afterword by John Herbert Gill.

When the television series *Mystery!* resumes this fall on Public Broadcasting, it will feature four Father Brown mysteries, drawn from the original Chesterton stories and starring Kenneth More in the title role.

Thomas F. Godfrey has edited *Murder for Christmas,* an anthology of over twenty stories by well known mystery writers. The Mysterious Press will publish it this fall.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

"The sky is blue, the sun is bright, yet you forget that everywhere there is evil under the sun," Hercule Poirot warns darkly. Yet, surveying the glistening Adriatic coastal island with its idyllic luxury hotel sheltering travelers out of the Smart Set, we find it easy to forget. It is the glittering setting of Agatha Christie's *Evil Under the Sun,* transposed in its screen version from England's Cornwall to a private resort isle in the Mediterranean where naughty innocents frolic in the days just before the war, where—in the words of hotelkeeper Maggie Smith—"Everything is kicky-poo." The kick is of course to be murder, but it hardly dents the high spirits of a joyous mystery film.

Evil is the third Hercule Poirot adventure in the spectacular British series which began with *Murder on the Orient Express;* it is the second to feature the protean Peter Ustinov as the Belgian detective. Although far from the petite figure some readers envision Poirot to be, Ustinov has nailed the role down as his own. To a Christie advocate who after seeing *Death on the Nile* complained that Poirot would never do things quite that way, Ustinov roared: "He does *now!*" In *Evil* Ustinov roots about the sundrenched locale, mingling with its glamorous tourists (some golddiggers, some gigolos), asking for nothing more than a spot in the shade—sunbathers, he remarks ruefully, are just so many pieces of meat—and cocoa in the morning. He has been brought to the island by a trifling little problem for the grey cells—why a millionaire should want to insure heavily a worthless paste diamond—and passes the time in his usual useful fashion, eavesdropping on conversations from afar. But then a killer strikes, and an alarmed Maggie Smith begs for his aid: "You know how peculiar people can be about a spot of murder!"

Helping the lighthearted zest and period feel of the film is the musical score, John Lanchbery's sprightly reworking of Cole Porter tunes, some of them unpublished—wondrously underlining the lush thirties atmosphere. Porter music in a mystery? It works surprisingly well, insinuating menace into lyrics like "Get out of town before it's too late, my dear" and drama into melodies like *Night and Day.* And each of the star players who are the victims and suspects in *Evil* have their own tuneful motifs: including imperious Diana Rigg, oily James Mason, ratty Roddy McDowall, fragile Jane Birkin, and brash Sylvia Miles, among others.

What makes *Evil* triumph? Undoubtably it is the sophisticated, ingenious script by Anthony Shaffer, who in 1970 presented Broadway with *Sleuth,* certainly among the very best mystery plays ever written. He took the basic Christie novel and, without violating its spirit, changed the setting and reworked the char-

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acters. Recently Shaffer discussed with EQMN his unabashed affection for the works of the Queen of Mystery.

"Christie was the main formative influence on the problem mystery, not only because she wrote more of the genre than any other writer, but because she was so various," notes Shaffer. Her devilishly clever solutions most often, like *Evil*, revolved around time-concealment, which had been familiar already, but in the educated and donnish works of Chesterton and Sayers; Christie succeeded in making it a popular literary form. It is a form Shaffer knows well. With his twin brother, playwright Peter Shaffer (*Equus*), he wrote (under the collaborative name Peter Anthony) three locked-room mysteries featuring the bizarre private detective, Mr. Verity, inspired perhaps by another time-concealment expert, John Dickson Carr.

Since *Sleuth*, he wrote the screenplay for Hitchcock's successful *Frenzy*, then a brooding film unraveling ancient rites called *The Wicker Man*. This year Broadway will raise the curtain on his *Whodunit*, a crime play about the killing of an "oily Levantine" in which the suspects are all listed in the program as archtypes: The Colonel, The Nephew from Australia, etc. Beyond that, he is preparing a play called *Murderer*, an exercise in Grand Guignol in which a not very successful painter named Norman Bartholemew decides if one can't be famous one can at least be infamous, rent by unappeasable passion—not a casual killer in a barroom nor a senseless slayer in a sordid family squabble but a great, classic murderer, the kind in the nightmare tableaux at Madame Tussaud's. One can hardly wait for *this* play to open.

Why did Shaffer change *Evil*'s locale from the Cornish coast to Majorca? Simply because the sun shines on Cornwall "in a very hesitant manner"—the weather there is mostly sweeping rain. The plot demanded sunkissed beaches, coves, and the sea—and the libertine French Mediterranean. (Although, Shaffer notes ruefully, for most American tourists Cornwall is probably more exotic than any tropical isle, a frequent U.S. destination!)

There is talk already about one more Poirot film, for which Shaffer has already done a preliminary script: *Appointment with Death*. So it is likely that in one more exotic locale (the ancient Palestine city of Petra) the probing Belgian detective will draw the suspects to a gathering "where all will be revealed," and the audiences will all agree with a grateful millionaire: "By God, Poirot, you're a wonder!"

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"Q"

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INTERVIEW: PATRICIA MOYES (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: You were born in County Wicklow, Ireland. Did you spend any part of your life there?

MOYES: I spent exactly three weeks, the first of my life, in County Wicklow, before I was deported as an undesirable political influence. I wonder if this is a record? Paradoxically, however, I feel extremely Irish and love Eire, although I have never lived there, but only gone back for vacations. I have always been made warmly welcome.

EQMN: What brought you to the British Virgin Islands to live?

MOYES: My husband and I discovered the British Virgin Islands as a vacation spot when we were living in Washington, D.C. He had always planned an early retirement and we hoped to live in Switzerland, where we had a mountain apartment, but Swiss law now makes it virtually impossible for a foreigner to become a permanent resident so we had to look for somewhere else. We had both been away from England for so long that we felt no desire to go back to the bad weather and high taxation—although I still love London and try to get back there every year.

We had been coming to Virgin Gorda for several years and felt very much at home on the island, where we had made good friends. The climate is perfect all year round, the beaches are fantastic, and so far the place hasn't been spoilt by too much tourism. There are a couple of superb hotels if you feel like dining out in great style—or you can live very simply. We found a beautiful piece of land high on a hill, with glorious views over the sea to other islands, and we built our home there.

Of course, there are disadvantages. First-class air mail takes anything from two to four weeks to and from Europe or the States. Only the most basic necessities of life can be bought here and they are very expensive. For major purchases one has to go by air or boat to Tortola, St. Thomas, or Puerto Rico. It's terribly difficult to get things repaired—stoves, freezers, TVs. There is no mains water or gas supply, no cinema, and no theater.

On the other hand, there are some fascinating people. Apart from the islanders, who are wonderful, the expatriates who live here are by definition a bit odd, and therefore interesting.

Our social circle may be small, but it contains—to take a few examples—a woman artist, a marine biologist, a couple of professional musicians, and so on. Our medical facilities are not very sophisticated—although a new hospital has just been opened up on our major island, Tortola—but this is made up for by the devotion and dedication of the doctors and nurses, both black and white, who have decided to serve the islands at a fraction of the money they could make elsewhere.

EQMN: You've worked in a number of exciting worlds—worlds many of us have fantasies about—including

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films, the theater, and the fashion industry.

MOYES: The theater is still a fantasy world to me. It was my first love—I wanted to be an actress from the age of two—and I know nothing to equal the thrill of standing at the back of the auditorium and hearing the audience responding with tears or laughter to lines one has written. Also, this is the only sort of writing which involves the author as part of a team, and therefore is never lonely.

My fantasy is still to write for the theater, but it is a very difficult medium and virtually impossible for somebody like me, married to a man whose work has taken him, and me, to many lovely and exciting places, but never to the hubs of the English-speaking theater—London or New York. I don't believe you can write for the stage unless you're a part of it and I have not been able to be.

Films are basically boring, as I tried to convey in *Falling Star.* There are certain technical fascinations, but I can't imagine anything less glamorous or even boring than a life in films—unless perhaps one was an independent director.

The fashion world is no place for a writer, but I'm grateful to it for giving me a job when I needed one, and for imposing a rigid discipline on my writing. I envied, but never had, the instinctive flair for fashion possessed by my colleagues in the Fashion Room—they simply *knew* when a look was right or wrong. Today, one of my greatest friends is an ex-colleague from *Vogue,* and she can look more stunningly stylish in an old raincoat than I ever could, even if all my clothes came from the greatest Paris houses. Like writing, this is a mysterious gift.

EQMN: Was your work on *Vogue* of help with *Murder a la Mode?*

MOYES: Yes, *Style* in *Murder a la Mode* is exactly *Vogue* as I remember it, with the characters changed, of course, but some fairly recognizable to anybody who worked there in those days. The friend I just mentioned was Beth, the Young Style Editor, and of course I was the murdered copywriter. I only went to Paris collections once for *Vogue,* but once was enough. I couldn't believe it was me, aspiring writer and dramatist, sitting perched on a little gilt chair in a hothouse of a salon, trying to take notes and get excited about hemlines. However, it provided me with a splendid background for the book. Also, I was married to a fashion photographer at the time, so I knew much more about what happened in the studio than most editorial writers would.

EQMN: You served in the radar section of the WAAF during World War II.

MOYES: Yes. I was very young—seventeen. We were being bombed, everybody else had either deserted us or been overrun by Hitler, and America was not yet involved in the war. I saw no alternative but to abandon my academic studies and join up. I had to pretend I was eighteen, which was the minimum age. The authorities obviously knew I was lying, as everybody in radar was screened like being put through a fine sieve, but blind eyes were turned to the question of my year of birth.

To me, the war years were like a

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heightened experience—more fun, more tragedy, more exhilaration, more anguish than I shall ever know again. However, it now appalls me to remember how we used to cheer and laugh and embrace each other in the Operations Room when we had guided a fighter pilot to shoot down a German bomber. "I got him! He's going down in flames!" the pilot's voice would come crackling down to us.

One can argue that we had helped save the lives of people who would otherwise have been bombed, but the brutal fact is that none of us gave a thought to the German crew, now hurtling to a hideous death. All I can say is that the experience, reflected over in peacetime, has left me the sort of person who rescues drowning flies from glasses of water and refuses to set traps for rats which are eating our food. We can spare it, can't we? In fact, my husband and the gardener do set traps without telling me but I can always tell when, from their guilty looks. I say nothing. I don't want to be a freak or a crank. But I will never again take a life if I can help it.

EQMN: You traveled a good distance to attend the International Congress of Crime Writers in New York. Do you find such congresses worthwhile?

MOYES: I found the New York Congress very worthwhile. It was very stimulating for somebody like me whose creative life is very isolated to meet and talk to people in the same profession. And one gets the feeling of the general pulse of the publishing business and its policies. It is also a most satisfactory way of curing what is locally known as "rock fever"—"I gotta get off this rock!" Even Paradise can become claustrophobic. However, I think what impressed me most about New York was that several people came up to me—we were all wearing name badges—and said, "Are you *really* Patricia Moyes? I thought you must be a pen-name for somebody else. Nobody has ever seen you."

I would like to assure everybody out there that Patricia Moyes is a very real person and that she, her husband, three dogs, and a cat are alive and well and living in Virgin Gorda.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Marvin Lachman, one of the best mystery critics around, has propounded several semi-tongue-in-cheek laws to guide fellow readers. One of them is "Never Read a Novel with a Swastika on the Cover; They're All Bad." This policy will serve its adherents well more times than not, but there are occasional exceptions, such as the latest novel by one of the contemporary masters of suspense fiction.

**** Elleston Trevor: *The Damocles Sword,* Playboy, $3.50. Englishman

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Martin Benedict infiltrates the SS on a mission to keep Hitler from getting the A-bomb first. The author, also known as Adam Hall, moves a large cast over a broad canvas of Europe in 1939 and 1940. His writing is painfully effective, creating not only the requisite action and suspense but a sense of horrible reality as well.

*** S. F. X. Dean: *By Frequent Anguish,* Walker, $9.95. Described on the jacket as "a love story interrupted by a murder," this gracefully written academic mystery tells of middle-aged professor Neil Kelly's efforts to find the killer of the twenty-year-old student he had hoped to marry. Venerable Old Hampton College becomes a character in its own right, and the town-and-gown contrasts are reminiscent of Thomas Kyd's mystery novels. (Puzzle for pseudonym sleuths: Who is Dean? He is said to be a former actor, Naval Intelligence officer, politician, and National Book Award nominee under his real name.)

*** Ben Healey: *Midnight Ferry to Venice,* Walker, $10.95. The latest in a series about painter Paul Hedley is a fast-moving, complicated thriller of the art world with a well wrought Venetian background. The rich style reveals some kinship to the author's historical mysteries about Bow Street Runner Jeremy Sturrock (published in the U.S. as by J. G. Jeffreys).

*** Sara Paretsky: *Indemnity Only,* Dial Press, $14.95. Though this Chicago private-eye novel goes through some very familiar paces and has its share of stock characters, protagonist V. I. (for Victoria, but call her Vic) Warshawski emerges as a likeable and fully realized figure to the novel's advantage. Paretsky has chosen a great name for her corrupt and mob-connected labor union: the International Brotherhood of Knifegrinders. Another strong debut.

*** Vincent McConnor: *The Paris Puzzle,* Macmillan, $12.95. The smooth style, the Gallic charm, and the rain-soaked, food-scented Parisian atmosphere make the third Inspector Damiot novel a pleasure to read—and make up for its recycling of mystery fiction's most overused surprise ending.

** Michael Geller: *Red-Hot and Dangerous,* Tower, $2.25. Like Collin Wilcox's Frank Hastings, New York detective Bud Dugan is a loner cop whose cases are on the borderline between procedural and private eye in tone. Geller uses clichés of both style and structure, but he makes his story move with the dash of a natural storyteller.

** Mary Challis: *Crimes Past,* Raven House, $2.25.

** Margaret Leek: *A Healthy Grave,* Raven House, $2.25. The prolific Sara Woods is represented in the Raven House line under at least three pseudonyms, of which Challis and Leek are two. Similar in style and mood (low-key cozy) to the novels about barrister Antony Maitland (though far from the best of his cases in quality), these are pleasant, readable, unstartling whodunits. Both new series feature English solicitors, Londoner Jeremy Locke in the Challis title, Anne Marryat in the Leek. The country-village atmosphere makes the Leek slightly the more interesting of the two.

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Louise was a nasty-tongued shrew looking for a meal ticket . . .

TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

by DAN J. MARLOWE

I didn't see the kid when he first came into my Washington, D.C. print shop. When I noticed him, he was already sitting in the single chair in the small reception area. He was lighting a cigarette and although I was eyeing him from the back of the shop I had the quick impression he was the most handsome young man I'd ever seen. He had blond hair and a country-club face. He looked about 25.

I walked out to the railing that separates the office part of the shop from the back. The kid rose as I approached him. Up close, he was just as handsome as he'd seemed from a distance. Except for his eyes. There was something flat-looking and unresponsive about his eyes which, I had to admit, hardly detracted at all from the Roman-god look of his features.

"I'm looking for a job," he said before I could speak. He pinched out his cigarette between his thumb and forefinger, then dropped the quenched butt into his shirt pocket.

"When did you get out?" I asked him.

His eyes narrowed. "Day before yesterday. You done time?"

"What you should say is you got out of the Army the day before yesterday," I told him.

He nodded. "I'll have to remember that. How'd you know I'd been in the gow?"

I mimicked pinching out a cigarette stub and putting it into my shirt pocket.

He nodded again. "I'll stop doin' it." He looked down at the betraying pocket. "You done time?" he repeated.

"They haven't caught me yet." I spoke again when the kid looked as if he was taking me seriously. "No, I haven't done time. Nobody

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has my fingerprints, not even the Army, but I have a brother at Lorton doing seven for manslaughter. I visit him a lot."

"Nobody does seven for manslaughter any more," he told me. "Not too many do seven for murder."

"There was this guard he didn't like inside," I explained.

"It's not hard," the kid agreed. He had a breadth of shoulders that said weight-lifter. He was looking beyond me into the rear of the shop. I was already lining up my little speech to let him know I regretted not having a job to give him when he spoke again. "Isn't that an old Miehle web press?" he asked.

Well, anyone who can recognize an old Miehle with a cover on it across a room can't be all bad around a print shop. The Miehle is almost a pet of mine. I keep it around mainly to remind myself of the days when a print shop did printing and not photography.

"It's a Miehle," I said. "You've worked with one?"

"Yeah. Inside." He gave me a smile that came and went like a lightning flash. I knew just as surely as if I'd read it in a notarized report that this kid had broken ten thousand female hearts. "Mostly poster work," he went on. "Medium-weight cardboard. I forget the gauge. I'd be no speed demon, but I figure in a week I could give you a real day's work. And I need the job."

"You'd have a parole officer walking in here taking you away from your work all the time," I pointed out.

"There is that," he admitted, and waited.

He wasn't begging, which would have turned me off. He was making a statement. He needed a job. I was ready to tell him my business was 95 percent offset when I remembered I'd turned down a job the previous week from a small theater chain to do their neighborhood window posters. It was a job that could be done on the Miehle, and looking at the kid standing there I began to get a flicker about killing two birds.

It took only three minutes to find out the poster job was still available—big shops don't care for all the hand labor involved in such work—and that the theater office could have their pasteups over to my place in an hour.

"You just went on the payroll," I told the kid.

"Thanks," he said. "You won't be sorry."

He didn't even ask what I was paying.

I found a withholding form in my cluttered desk and gave it to him to fill out. He sat down at the desk and printed carefully. He was smooth enough verbally but his education obviously hadn't been

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completed at the Sorbonne. He hesitated for a moment, then looked up at me. "Okay if I fill in the address tomorrow? I'll have a place to stay then."

"Sure. But I thought you needed a job *and* a place to stay before you walked?"

"I had both set up from the same party. But then I found out there was some hasslin' went with it." He looked down involuntarily at his right hand. The knuckles were deep maroon and scraped in a manner advertising they had intercepted a couple of sets of teeth. "I backed away from it," the kid continued. "It bothers you?"

"No. Just be on time for work mornings." Do it right, I told myself. I went upfront with $150 and the kid said thanks.

Three days later he was doing a passable job with the Miehle. He was never going to pay his way in the shop with the little bit of archaic stuff they'd taught him inside, but it didn't bother me. I was still thinking about two birds with one stone.

My wife Louise walked into the shop one afternoon to put the tap on me for fifty bucks over and above her house money. It was something she did frequently. She'd never been anything but a waitress, but after I married her she put on airs that nipped savagely at my bank account. I usually paid to keep the peace unless I was feeling rugged enough to endure six or eight hours of bad-mouthing.

When a man past fifty marries a 22-year-old woman, he deserves everything he gets. What I got was a nasty-tongued shrew looking for a meal ticket. The first year it had seemed to be worth it. Ever since it definitely hadn't. She had a strange taste in men—among whom I hadn't been included recently. I could have ended the situation, but the thought of joining my brother at Lorton had been deterrent enough so far to keep Louise's promiscuous hide in one piece.

"Who's the hunk?" she asked when she saw the kid at the rear of the shop.

"Ex-con," I explained. "He needed a job so I put him on."

She turned to look at me. "Since when did you get so charitable? What was he in for?"

"Rape."

Actually the kid had told me it was a stock swindle. "Don't try to talk me into teaching you offset," I told him. "I don't want you printing stock certificates on my press."

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Louise snorted when I mentioned rape. "Is that your way of telling me I'd better stay away from him?"

"Since when did anything I tell you ever have an effect?"

She was ready to cut loose on me then with her verbal machine gun but I knew she was afraid the kid would hear her.

Louise isn't a bad-looking head. She switched her butt in and out of my office two or three times more than necessary after she'd separated me from the fifty, but I couldn't see that the kid even looked in our direction.

Louise knew what time I had lunch. The next day I came back from lunch and found her talking to him in the rear of the shop. She had on a dress I hadn't seen before. I stayed in the office and let them go to it. I was sure I was using the right bait for her, but I wasn't nearly as sure about him. Still, although I was never a Boy Scout I know what happens when two objects are rubbed together.

She'd never been finicky about staying home nights with me. Now she was much less so. The kid began showing up in the mornings looking bleary-eyed. Louise looked like a cat who'd swallowed a couple of bullfinches. I did a fine job of apparently ignoring the whole thing.

Then Louise started to brag. "He's so good-looking, you thought he'd never make a play for me," she informed me over a TV dinner one night. "Well, he has."

"Talk's cheap," I goaded her. We had long since given up all pretense of civility.

She shoved a ring under my nose. "You never gave me anything like this," she said scornfully. She was right about that. The size of the stone in the ring was an eye-popper. And it looked real. It made me think the kid might not be spending all his getting-bleary-eyed time with Louise. It looked more like he'd branched out into second-story work.

He came to work one morning in a four-hundred-dollar silk suit and I knew the dance was over before the right waltz had been played. From my brother's stories of his friends inside, I knew that when an ex-yardbird showed up looking like a bird of paradise a heavily breathing parole officer couldn't be far behind.

"Yeah," the kid said, correctly interpreting my expression. "This is goodbye. I'm movin' on. Way on."

He offered me his hand.

"I'm sorry to see you leave right now," I said truthfully.

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"Yeah, well, you know how it is." He waved a hand vaguely. "It's time. You did me a big favor, man. You hung a perfect screen between the cops an' me while I was organizin' a deal. So now I'm gonna do you a favor. You know your wife is no good."

It wasn't a question and didn't seem to require an answer.

"An' you want shut of her, right?" he continued. "Okay, I'm takin' her with me. She'll be out've your hair." He was smiling, the first full, open smile I'd seen since he came to work for me. He waggled a finger at me in reproof. "Never try to con a con man, pal. I knew what you were tryin' to do in the first fifteen minutes. But it's no sweat. I'll take her with me, an' in a couple of months I'll drop her off in some South American whorehouse."

I must have flinched, because he smiled again. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Not quite as hard-boiled as you thought you were?" He shook his head in smiling disgust. "You citizens are all alike. When it comes to the crunch you all chicken out. Would you like it better if I left Louise at a sidewalk café in Pago Pago with an unpaid hotel bill that would take her six months' waitressing to get out of hock an' back here? An' meanwhile you'd have the divorce on wheels?"

"I'd like it better," I agreed. "But run up the hotel bill so it will hold her for a year."

"You got it, pal. It should be a week before the cops show up here an' start hasslin' you about where I am."

He gave me a salute and left the shop. I locked up and went home. Louise was gone. Her clothes were gone. The half ton of facial creams and perfumes usually on top of her bureau were gone. There was no note. I sat down in my favorite armchair for a couple of moments and just basked in the pure unadulterated sense of freedom.

When I went back to the shop, I started to put the canvas tarp back on the old Miehle. Tucked behind the cleaned-up ink rollers I found $5,000 in hundred-dollar bills. My first thought was that it was counterfeit. It wasn't. The kid had a nice way of paying his bills. I stood there with the money in my hand, wondering what kind of a swindle the kid had worked to make his score. It must have involved a fleet of locomotives at least. A fleet of locomotives that didn't exist.

But he didn't have as much lead time as he thought. A day later two F.B.I. men showed up in my shop. They waved a paste-up of a wanted flyer at me. It had a good picture of the kid. They asked

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about an hour's worth of questions, at the end of which I apologized for not being very helpful.

"I'll have one of these dropped off for you after we get them printed up." It was the older F.B.I. man, showing me the flyer again. "Be sure and call us if you hear anything from this character."

I took the paste-up out of his hand. "Who prints these up for you?" I asked him.

"The office puts them out for bid," the younger man said.

After they left, it took me only two telephone calls to find out what the F.B.I. had paid for their last order of flyers. I put in a bid 18 percent lower for the next batch and won the bid. When the paste-ups arrived at my shop for the seventeen wanted posters, the kid's was among them. Somehow when I ran his batch, the picture came out looking a little smeared. Not much. Just a little.

So I'm not afraid any foreign cops somewhere in the world will find him before he has time to set up Louise.

I'm not afraid because I coppered the bet.

Before I ran the 20,000 copies of the kid's poster I removed his fingerprints from the paste-up and substituted my own.

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a *NEW* short story by

SHIZUKO NATSUKI

The tale of a strawberry-patterned handkerchief as potentially tragic as Desdemona's and of the secret trip to the Azumaya Inn in Yamaguchi—a "love mystery" by the author whom Eastern critics have called "the Agatha Christie of Japan" . . .

I CAN'T HELP LOVING HIM

by SHIZUKO NATSUKI

(translated by Robert B. Rohmer)

Inspector Hisafuji Takao of the Moji Precinct in Kita Kyushu City read over his notes once more with great deliberation. These notes were crucial to the murder case in question. Indeed, the Investigator's office had already come up with a Number One suspect in the person of Moriya Masako. She was thirty years old, had a sleek pale complexion, and was a woman in her prime. Her large eyes revealed a lively imagination. All in all she was an intelligent and attractive woman.

Nevertheless, in the interrogation room she had apparently broken under the pressure of a battery of investigators. She said she would like to make a written statement concerning the events surrounding the murder. The following is her statement; the underlining was added later by Inspector Hisafuji.

MORIYA MASAKO'S STATEMENT—THE FIRST

Rain was falling steadily on the morning of June 11. It looked as though a veil had been wrapped around the window. I awoke at dawn and lay in bed watching the sky change from dim gray to opaque white. From the moment I opened my eyes I felt excited, like a schoolgirl on the day of a class outing.

Finally eleven o'clock approached; that was the time I was to meet

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Katsuki in front of the ticket office of the Sanyo Line at Moji Station. The prospect of seeing him made me so happy it hurt. We were planning a short trip together, just two days and one night.

I no longer feel like trying to hide the sort of relationship I have with Katsuki Keisuke. The fact is, a trip like this, even a short one, was very important to us, for it was only in a town where no one knew us that we could display our true affection for each other and devote ourselves fully to our love.

My husband, Moriya Sozo, worked as the sales manager for a company producing electronic equipment. Katsuki, my lover, owns a store that is one of the retail outlets of my husband's company. The size of Katsuki's store is small and he does not have long ties with the parent company. The result is that my husband was in a position to ruin Katsuki's business if he chose to. Such a move would have been child's play for my husband.

Sozo was a big man with cunning features; he was very jealous, and sadistic by nature. He always kept a close eye on my behavior. Recently he became suspicious of something because I learned that he had been in touch with a private detective. That is why there was no chance at all for Katsuki and me to have our rendezvous in a small town like Moji.

Even though I say we went on trips together, we never really went very far away. We would use any pretext at all to slip away for a night or two—if Sozo was away on business; or sometimes I would say I was going out of town to attend the wedding of one of my friends—that sort of thing. Still, the little time we had together always seemed to slip by too quickly.

We had a little game we played when we took these trips; we would each play a certain fantasy role. On this particular trip I was to play the part of a woman who had committed some terrible crime and was on the run. I used a scarf to conceal most of my face and wore a large pair of dark glasses. I made a point of staying in the shadows where people could not get a clear look at me.

Throughout the trip I spoke to no one but Katsuki, and of course I made every effort not to let anyone get a good look at my face. Katsuki's role was to pretend that he was my lover, that he sympathized with my predicament, and was trying to help me escape.

This game had been Katsuki's suggestion, and it was important that we play it. We did not know when we might be spotted by the private detective Sozo had hired, and it was essential that he not be able to prove that I was Katsuki's companion. As long as we

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accomplished that, we were safe. In fact, we never actually put this into words and discussed it—we always pretended it was just a childish game we were playing.

This may sound funny to someone who is not in love, but by transforming ourselves into these two imaginary characters we were able to forget for a time that we might really be caught at what we were doing. In another sense, though, perhaps it was just a cautious desire to travel incognito.

The 11:11 train out of Moji had two first-class cars. I took a seat next to the window and without thinking started to remove my sunglasses, but Katsuki stopped me. He was quite upset. He pointed out that the conductor who came around checking tickets could be the detective in disguise. I laughed at that, but kept my glasses on.

It was past noon when we reached Ogori where we transferred to an old-fashioned diesel train on the Yamaguchi Line. *Here too Katsuki maneuvered me into a seat in the very front corner of the car, so no one would be able to get a good look at me.*

At 12:33 we arrived in Yamaguchi. This was our destination, and for a town that houses the offices of the prefectural government, it seemed very quiet. We found a taxi in the nearly deserted square in front of the station and took it to the northeast section of town. "Rurikoji Temple," was what Katsuki told the driver.

Rurikoji Temple, or Temple of the Shining Lapis, is an elegant place. There is a large garden in front of the temple, with a blue pond surrounded by all sorts of trees—pine, cherry, red-leafed maple, and azalea. It was a Saturday afternoon, but because the weather was still quite chilly after the rain, there was not a soul in the garden. We walked until we came to the foot of a five-story pagoda.

The pagoda is more than a hundred feet tall and stands like a mystical vision against a backdrop of mountains receding in the mist. This pagoda had been built by the Ouchi clan who ruled central Japan during the medieval period. It is a monument of rare beauty even among those few pagodas that have been officially designated as national treasures. We had come to Yamaguchi to see this pagoda.

There is a stone tablet there dedicated to the poet Bokusui on which is carved his poem:

Deep in the mountains
In the old temple compound
At the foot of the ancient pagoda
A traveler stands.
Early summer.

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Here, for the first time since we left Moji, I removed my sunglasses. The pagoda was built in the classic style with its balconies and its five roofs, each roof having upturned corners. Its dignified form gives the viewer an indescribable sense of tranquility. It impressed itself so vividly on my mind that I can see it even now if I close my eyes. At that moment I felt very close to Katsuki, knowing the same breeze that caressed my skin touched his, and the same serenity that enveloped me, enveloped him.

At that moment a figure suddenly appeared from the shadow of the pagoda. I was not expecting this, and was startled for a moment, but when I looked again, I saw that he was wearing the black robes of a Buddhist priest and seemed to be a twelve- or thirteen-year-old acolyte.

He had just emerged from behind the pagoda and it looked as though he too was startled to find us standing there. He stared intently at us. Our eyes met and we must have gazed at each other for three or four seconds. Then I smiled. As I did so, the boy smiled back showing a dimple.

Suddenly Katsuki took my arm, saying, "Come on, let's go." *For some reason Katsuki seemed very upset by this encounter.* Perhaps he was just angry that our private game had been interrupted, if only by a young acolyte. I understood this intuitively, so I quickly put on my sunglasses and we walked away.

There is an old-fashioned Japanese-style inn that looks more like a private home than a hostel. It is located on Nishikikoji Street that runs south out of town. We spent the night there.

Even at this inn I continued to play the role of the fugitive. *Katsuki insisted on this.* I wore my sunglasses while we were being shown to our room, and even there, whenever one of the maids came in, I would step out onto the veranda as though viewing the mountains. Katsuki took care of everything, even ordered dinner served in our room.

It was nearly midnight when we went to bed. After a blissful interlude together, I slept soundly the rest of the night without even having dreams. I knew that I belonged to Katsuki—what more could there be to dream about?

When I awoke, the rain had cleared. Bright sunlight came through the paper shoji screens and lit up the room. It was eight o'clock; I had been asleep for more than seven hours.

Katsuki had already put on a fresh white shirt and was outside

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on the veranda looking at the view. His eyes were slightly swollen and he was squinting into the bright morning sun.

"It was too hot and sticky last night. I couldn't sleep," he mumbled as he took me in his arms for the first kiss of the day.

There is one more detail I should mention about our stay at the inn. It seems like a trivial matter, but somehow it sticks in my mind and nags at me.

The back of the inn looks out over the forested area of a public park, and perhaps it is for this reason there are so many insects at night. There was one particular variety of small white moth that clustered in clouds around the light in our room. Even when we closed the glass door, two or three of them somehow managed to find openings and get in. We could hear the flutter of their tiny wings at they beat against the fluorescent light on the veranda.

Before going to bed that night I had washed a handkerchief and hung it on the railing of the veranda to dry. It was silk with a pattern of strawberries on it, and it had my initial embroidered in one corner.

The next morning when I got up, I discovered that the handkerchief had dirty yellow stains all over it; the moths had soiled it. One late rising moth was still clinging to the edge of the handkerchief. It fell to the floor like a petal from a hydrangea flower made of paper.

When Katsuki casually mentioned this to the middle-aged maid who brought our breakfast, she said, "Oh, that has to be washed at once, otherwise you'll never get those stains out. Here, let me take it and wash it right now." She explained to us that if it was just a handkerchief that got soiled, it wasn't so bad; often they had instances in which a white shirt or a white suit was ruined. She smiled and took the handkerchief downstairs to be laundered.

As it turned out, I never got that handkerchief back. After breakfast we enjoyed a quick embrace to celebrate the end of our trip, then hurried to the taxi we had called to the inn. We barely made it to the station in time to catch our train.

I did not realize I had forgotten the handkerchief until shortly after our express train had pulled out of Ogori Station. Katsuki laughed and said I could afford to lose one handkerchief, but for some reason, at that moment I felt an ominous premonition in my heart. That handkerchief had been a present from my husband when he had gone to Hong Kong with a group of his golfing buddies.

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Perhaps it was just that I was suddenly reminded of the handkerchief that Othello gave to Desdemona.

The express was on schedule, arriving at the gloomy platform at Moji Station at 11:30.

I went first and got off the train alone. I had my face covered with a scarf and the dark glasses, and I kept my head down. I wore the same clothes I had worn throughout the trip so that even though I seemed to be alone I would not be recognized in case anyone living in my neighborhood also happened to be getting off or meeting the train.

I have never felt such a sense of foreboding as I did in the taxi on the way home. I felt pain in my heart after parting from Katsuki; but more than that, I was afraid my husband would know what we had been doing. I had told him I was going to visit a certain friend, but if by chance that friend had called while I was gone, everything would be exposed. As it turned out, there was more reason than I had supposed for my sense of doom.

As the taxi turned into our quiet, residential street, I could see our house with its garden of mixed shrubs. Just the sight of it suddenly filled me with terror.

I got out of the taxi and used my key to open the front door. My husband ordinarily goes out to play golf on Sunday and doesn't return home until evening; but that day I expected him to be home since I was to accompany him that afternoon to attend the wedding of a business client.

I opened the door. The house was silent, the air motionless. There was no sign of breakfast dishes in the kitchen. The stillness was eerie and I was suddenly very cautious without knowing exactly why.

I walked down the corridor to the bedroom to change clothes. As I opened the bedroom door, the nightmare I had been dreading became a reality. My husband was lying on his side on one of the twin beds. His face was pale as alabaster, his eyes wide-open, but focused on nothing. Suddenly I realized he was dead.

The quilts were thrown off the bed. A long thin kitchen knife was stuck to the hilt in the region of his heart. The blood that had flowed from the wound was not yet completely dry; it formed a darkish puddle on the sheets . . .

I don't suppose it is necessary for me to tell what happened after that. I called an ambulance and it arrived in about ten minutes. A short while later two patrol cars pulled up to the house with their

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siren screaming. From that moment I seem to have lost track of everything—my consciousness, the passage of time, everything. Now I no longer need to keep any secrets.

I realized that anything I tried to hide would surely be brought to light in a hurry by the police investigation. Especially my love affair with Katsuki. If Sozo had entertained any real suspicion about our relationship he would immediately have taken steps to plunge Katsuki's company into bankruptcy; then he would have held me to my vows as his legal wife and spent the rest of his life tormenting me in that cruel sadistic way of his. His death saved us from that disastrous eventuality.

I would be lying if I didn't say that both Katsuki and I were prepared to take drastic measures if Sozo had found out about us. As it turned out, however, for better or for worse, we were never put to the test. We are innocent.

According to what the police tell me, my husband's death was caused by a knife wound in the heart while he slept, and that the estimated time of his death was between three and four o'clock in the morning of June 12.

I can prove that at that time Katsuki Keisuke was asleep in a room at the Azumaya Inn in Yamaguchi. I am confident that he will attest to the fact that at the same time I was sound asleep beside him.

(signed) Moriya Masako

That Sunday evening, after the discovery of Sozo's body, Inspector Hisafuji paid a visit to the apartment of Katsuki Keisuke. It was located in a crowded residential district backing up on the slopes of Mt. Fudetate, in the northern part of Moji.

An investigation had been opened in the case of Sozo's murder. Suicide was ruled out because of the angle at which the knife had been plunged into his heart. Also because Sozo's fingerprints were not on the knife. In fact, not a single fingerprint was found on the dark handle of the knife, supporting the theory that the murderer had wiped them off before fleeing.

Besides, there was no real motive for suicide. At the age of forty-two he already held the position of sales manager for the K Electronics Company. In that position he had attracted the attention of the managing director and had been promised an important promotion in the near future. He was in good health. His family life with his wife Masako was marred only by the fact that they had no

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children; from the outside, they seemed to have a rich and satisfying life together. In any event, he was not the sort of weak-willed man who would commit suicide even if he did have some trouble with his wife.

On the other hand, it was quite simple to discover a motive for murder.

Within the K Electronics Company at this time there was an open conflict between two factions over who should be next in line for the presidency. One faction centered around the vice president, the other was led by the managing director. Sozo had been the managing director's hatchetman and that, combined with his normally abrasive, strong-willed personality, meant that he had made enemies within the company. Since he was in a position of direct control over the retail outlets, it could be assumed that he also had a few shady deals going outside the company.

Nearly forty investigators fanned out from police headquarters in Moji. From the very beginning, however, Hisafuji had his eye on Masako. What brought her under suspicion was her affairs with Katsuki.

The theory was that a door had been left unlocked and that the murderer had come through the adjoining room and stabbed Sozo in the heart while he was asleep. It was possible, of course, that some outsider had done it, but it was more likely that the murderer knew Sozo was sleeping alone that night and that the murderer was someone familiar with the layout of the house.

Katsuki Keisuke lived alone in an unpretentious two-room apartment in an ordinary, two-story apartment building. He was thirty-six years old. He had married ten years before, but his wife had died almost immediately from some illness, and since that time he had lived alone. After graduating from college, he worked for a time in the front office of the K Electronics Company, but after five years he set up his own retail outlet. Since that time his business proved to be sound and stable even though it was a small enterprise in a very competitive world.

Since Inspector Hisafuji had phoned ahead, Katsuki was expecting him and showed him straight into the dining room. Katsuki was a tense, dark-complexioned man, not very tall, but with a brawny build. His eyes behind his dark-rimmed glasses now seemed strangely uneasy, and when Hisafuji caught his eye, Katsuki looked away.

Katsuki's version of the trip in response to Hisafuji's questions corresponded in all its main points with Masako's version. Katsuki,

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however, was not quite sure of some of the details. Hisafuji had the feeling that any discrepancy in their stories was not because one was a man and the other a woman, but because of the difference in the affection they felt for each other.

When Katsuki had finished his account, Inspector Hisafuji turned his attention to the heart of the story. "You say that on the evening in question you went to bed around midnight and finally got up at six thirty. You say that Masako did not get up until around eight o'clock."

"That's right," said Katsuki, keeping his eyes on the floor.

"You say that for some reason you had difficulty sleeping and woke up several times during the night, and that once you even got out of bed. Masako, however, slept soundly all night."

"Of course," Katsuki answered promptly enough, but there was a flicker in his eyes.

Hisafuji stared at Katsuki, trying to make up his mind. The point of this interview was to put pressure on Masako; it did not seem necessary to go after Katsuki as well. Before leaving the police station, Hisafuji had crossed Katsuki's name off his list of suspects. The young man's alibi was watertight.

Shortly after Masako presented her written statement, one of the investigators had taken photos of both Katsuki and Masako to the Azumaya Inn in Yamaguchi. This resulted in verification that on the fateful night, between three and four in the morning, when the murder had been committed, Katsuki had left his room and spent the time until morning playing Go in the lobby with the desk clerk who was waiting for the arrival of a party of early guests. The woman who ran the inn also clearly remembered Katsuki's face.

But it turned out that only Katsuki had an alibi at the inn. When the photograph of Masako was shown, the people at the inn could only shake their heads with uncertainty. Masako, or a woman calling herself Masako, had never clearly revealed her face. The maid who had been working at the time said she only had a rear view of a woman standing on the veranda. In the end, all she could testify to was that Katsuki had been accompanied by a woman who was about the same age and build as Masako. No one at the inn was certain that the woman was definitely Masako.

It was clear that Katsuki had not been the one who murdered Sozo. Katsuki himself, of course, had known that from the beginning, and must also have realized that he would have no trouble estab-

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lishing an alibi. Under these circumstances, then, why was he so agitated when Hisafuji questioned him?

"It goes without saying that there is a serious problem concerning my relationship with the murdered man," Katsuki admitted.

"If you had not said that," Hisafuji observed, "you would have been in deep trouble. You see, I have considered every possible angle of this case."

"Every possible angle?"

"That's right. As you know perfectly well, the room where you stayed that night was at the outer edge of the building and there was an emergency exit adjacent to your veranda. The key was in the lock, so the exit could be easily opened. By using that exit a person could slip out of the hotel unseen. It is just seventy-seven kilometers from Yamaguchi to Moji. At that time of night a trip would take little over an hour. Even supposing it took an hour and a half, the round trip would be just three hours and if we allow half an hour for committing the murder—"

"What are you getting at?" interrupted Katsuki. Beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead.

Hisafuji's voice became sharper. "Masako could have secretly hidden a car near the Azumaya Inn that night. It is quite possible for her to have gone to bed with you, then slipped out around two o'clock, driven the car home, and committed the crime. She could have been back at the inn and in bed again by five thirty. You see, I came to call on you today so we could consider this possibility together. Are you prepared to say that Masako was with you the entire night of June eleventh—from the time you went to bed until morning?"

When Hisafuji looked Katsuki in the eye, the younger man's gaze darted away. After a long agonizing silence he raised his head and looked at the detective. There was an anguished expression on his face. "No question about it," he said. "We were together the whole time. As you know, I was in the lobby from three o'clock until four o'clock, but she was sound asleep both when I left the room, and when I returned to it."

"Are you positive?" Katsuki nodded his head. It was pointless for Hisafuji to repeat the question. It would be up to the inquest jury to consider the relationship between Katsuki and Masako and to decide how much weight to give to his confirmation of Masako's alibi.

Five minutes later Hisafuji left Katsuki's apartment.

When the heavy metal door of the apartment had closed behind

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him, Hisafuji's footsteps echoed loudly as he walked along the concrete corridor to the corner. There he removed his shoes, and quietly on tiptoe he returned to Katsuki's door.

Beside the door was a kitchen that had a small window facing onto the corridor. This window was slightly open. Hisafuji quickly brought his face near the opening.

After seeing Hisafuji to the door, Katsuki had returned to the sofa and was now sitting on it. A shadow of exhaustion and deep furrows creased his face.

Presently he went to the telephone near the door. In that position he was beyond Hisafuji's line of vision, but very close to where the detective stood. Hisafuji drew back from the window.

He heard Katsuki dial, then say, "Hello, Kazuko? It's me." There was a brusqueness about his voice that suggested he was speaking to someone very familiar. Hisafuji could not, of course, hear what the other person said.

"Just as I expected, a detective was here to question me. He's gone now, but—well, everything is going as planned. I appreciate what you did."

Katsuki was just hanging up the phone when Hisafuji opened the door.

"Before you hang up, I would like to ask your friend a few questions." Hisafuji's voice was even quieter than before.

When Hisafuji finished speaking, Masako's face showed neither anger nor fear, only a curious expression of emptiness.

The two sat facing each other in the living room of Masako's house. Through the curtains they could see the flowers in the garden luminous in the evening twilight. Though she was deeply under suspicion, Masako had been allowed to return home because none of the authorities thought she had any intention of trying to flee.

"I just can't believe he would tell such a big lie." Masako was sitting opposite Hisafuji, her eyes focused on nothing and her voice hardly a murmur.

"You say he is lying, then?"

"But didn't he say the woman he went to Yamaguchi with was someone other than me?"

"Yes, that's right. Katsuki has confessed that you called him three days before the murder and asked him to take along a bar hostess named Kazuko. They were to follow exactly the route you had laid out for them."

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"But that's a lie! In the first place, why would he have gone along with such a request even if I had made it?"

"For money. He had some promissory notes due and said you transferred nearly five million yen from your bank account to his. You told him that if this little trip with the stand-in was successful, you'd forget all about the money and go your separate ways. Katsuki would then be free to marry Kazuko, and you would be free from your domineering husband. On top of that you would inherit everything that had belonged to your husband. This was the plot the three of you planned together."

"That's not so! It wasn't like that at all. What a terrible thing to suggest."

Masako's pale cheeks flushed for a moment, then suddenly paled again. At the same time her eyes opened wide and she stared straight at Hisafuji. In her eyes at that moment, replacing the vacant look, was a flame that burned as though she was possessed. "Now I understand! He planned the whole thing. He framed me. It was his idea that I should not let anyone see my face that day. I'll bet he had some problems in his dealings with my husband. That's why he arranged things this way, to destroy my alibi. He killed my husband while I was asleep, now he's trying to pin the blame on me."

"Get hold of yourself now, Mrs. Moriya." Hisafuji looked at Masako, trying to calm her down. "Katsuki has a watertight alibi, even without you to verify it. The people at the inn have confirmed that he did not leave the Azumaya during the crucial period."

"So he was only trying to trap me, is that it? I suppose he doesn't love me any more. He just wants to get me out of the way. That's why he's telling these lies. But let me tell you something, even if he hadn't tried to do this, I was going to leave him anyway. I knew he'd cast me aside as soon as I was no longer useful to him."

Masako raised her tear-stained face and gazed into Hisafuji's eyes. "I swear it's true that I accompanied Katsuki on the trip that day. I can recall vividly everything we did and saw—the deserted streets of Yamaguchi, the five-story pagoda that stood there like a fantasy in the rain and mist—wait! That's it."

Suddenly an excited light blazed in Masako's eyes. "We met a young acolyte, maybe twelve or thirteen years old, while standing in front of the pagoda. That was the only time I did not have my sunglasses on. Just for a few moments we stood there face to face. Find that boy and ask him—he can prove beyond a doubt that I was with Katsuki that day."

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"Well, now—"

"Besides that, there is also proof at the inn." Masako's face was gradually beginning to regain its color. "When we departed from the inn, I left a handkerchief behind. It's a silk handkerchief with a pattern of strawberries on it, and it has my initial embroidered on it."

"All right, I'll check it out."

Shortly before noon the following day Hisafuji arrived at the Azumaya Inn at Yamaguchi. Just as Masako had told the police in her statement, the inn faced a narrow cobbled street and had an old-fashioned latticed gate. The building itself looked like the sort of private residence one might find on a back street in Kyoto. At the mouth of the alley beside the entrance was a profusion of pink and white blooming flowers. The day was overcast and through the humid air the Inspector could hear the tinkle of a wind chime.

The woman who owned the inn was in her fifties, dressed in a Japanese kimono. She nodded in answer to Hisafuji's questions and spoke promptly and courteously, "Yes, we forgot to give the handkerchief back when they were leaving." She withdrew into the building and reappeared two minutes later with the handkerchief carefully folded.

It was a white handkerchief with no pattern of strawberries, but an initial was embroidered on the silk. The design was fancy and hard to read, but he could clearly make out a K. Automatically the name Kazuko came to Hisafuji's mind. He left the Azumaya Inn as soon as he had received the handkerchief.

This was the first flaw in Masako's story. If she had indeed stayed at the Azumaya, she could hardly have left this handkerchief behind. Her initial would be M. On the other hand, if Katsuki had been following a plan set out by Masako, and was going to leave behind a handkerchief to avert suspicion, he would hardly have left one of Kazuko's.

Hisafuji walked along Nishikikoji Street and followed the banks of the river under a row of graceful willow trees. He was heading for the Rurikoji, the Temple of the Shining Lapis.

The main hall of the Rurikoji Temple is an impressive building with a cedar thatched roof. In front of the veranda grew vast clusters of delicate Japanese iris. In the midst of the flowers stood a sign saying *THE HALL FOR ZEN MEDITATION*. Curving around to the left was the path to the priest's quarters.

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Just as he reached the dirt-paved entry hall, Hisafuji met a woman in a trim dress who appeared to be the priest's wife. He showed his badge and explained what he wanted.

"You must be looking for our eldest son. He's just now come home from school," she said. The woman turned back into the house and called the boy's name. Almost immediately there appeared a boy about junior high-school age wearing an open-collared shirt. The boy's large eyes widened in surprise when he learned Hisafuji's identity.

First, the detective asked the boy if he remembered what he had been doing on June eleventh. That was only three days ago, and the boy seemed to have no difficulty remembering. Next, Hisafuji placed four photographs in front of the boy. One was a photograph of Masako, another a photo of Kazuko, the other two were pictures of female police officers.

The boy picked up each photograph and looked at it intently. At last he pointed without hesitation to the photograph of Masako. "I remember clearly," he said. "This woman was here with a man. They stood for a long time gazing at the pagoda."

Kobayashi Kazuko was a cabaret hostess in Moji. It did not seem that she would have had time to be involved in the crime until it came to light that she had taken time off from work to return to her home town of Miyazaki. Her absence on the night of June eleventh had been unauthorized, and she was away from work on the twelfth as well; then she showed up for work again as usual on the thirteenth without bothering to explain her absence to anyone.

At first she insisted that on the two days in question she had gone to Yamaguchi with Katsuki, but under Hisafuji's relentless questioning, she broke down and confessed. She said she had not felt like going to work that day, so she stayed home and moped around the apartment for a while; then suddenly the idea of returning to her parents' home struck her, and she set out for Miyazaki.

Proof of this was quickly established. Both her family and people in this neighborhood confirmed that on those two days she had indeed been at her parents' home in a suburb of Miyazaki. Now Kazuko had established her alibi, but in doing so cast considerable doubt on Katsuki's claim that he had taken her to Yamaguchi at Masako's request. There was nothing left for Hisafuji but to play his trump card and pay an evening visit to Katsuki's store.

One of the clerks showed him in just as Katsuki was coming down

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the stairs from the second floor, carrying a sports jacket. As he showed the detective into a modest reception room, the expression on his face betrayed nothing, but there was no sign of shiftiness in his eyes as there had been the first time Hisafuji questioned him. Rather his eyes were alert and glittering. He seemed to have guessed the significance of Hisafuji's second visit. Perhaps Kazuko had phoned him.

"What can I say?" said Katsuki. There was no emotion in his voice as he continued, "The story I told you the other day was false. You are right, the woman who accompanied me to Yamaguchi was Masako."

"Then why did you go to all the trouble to make up the other story?" asked Hisafuji quietly. He did not have to be intimidating now.

"I wanted Masako to be blamed for the murder. I wanted to break off my relationship with her."

"What's that supposed to mean? Are you bound to her because of the money you owe?"

"That's right. As I told you the other day, I borrowed five million yen from her. Maybe she intended to control me, to own me. To tell you the truth, her passion is so frenzied that it sometimes frightens me."

Katsuki flicked a glance at Hisafuji and pursed his lips. Then he smiled, a cold, bitter smile. "It's embarrassing, but the fact is that in a small business like mine it is not so easy to pay back five million yen. So—"

"You're saying it was just a plan to pin the murder on Masako so you wouldn't have to repay the money?"

"Of course I didn't plan it that way from the beginning. In the first place, I had no idea that Sozo would be murdered that night. Our trip to Yamaguchi was no different from any of the others we have taken. Masako had been pestering me for a long time to take her on a trip, so finally we decided to spend a night at Yamaguchi."

"Then why did you make all those elaborate preparations so that no one but yourself would see her face while you were on the trip?"

"That wasn't anything we had arranged; it was just something we happened to think up on the spur of the moment. It was true that Sozo had hired a private detective, and there was some chance that he might be following either Masako or me. It was just a game Masako came up with to protect ourselves."

"What about the business of the handkerchief?"

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"Ah." Katsuki paused for a moment and a thin smile came to his lips. This time Hisafuji sensed a chilling brutality beneath Katsuki's masculine features. "That was also something that happened quite by chance. I had intended to give the maid Masako's stained handkerchief, but somehow I got them mixed up and gave her one of mine instead. After all, my initial is K, you know. It seems the whole thing has been just a series of odd coincidences—that was what persuaded me to try my plan.

"When we returned from the trip and I heard that Sozo had been murdered, I realized right away that both Masako and I would be under suspicion. I could count on the people at the inn to verify my alibi, but I was the only one who could confirm Masako's. As soon as I realized that, I decided I could use those coincidences to get rid of Masako once and for all.

"As for Kazuko, I was planning to marry her some day, but when I heard that she had gone alone to Miyazaki, it occurred to me that I had the perfect setup. That's when I came up with the story about Kazuko having taken Masako's place."

"I see. You say you decided to do all this after you learned of the murder, but I don't believe you. I think what you really did was hire someone to murder Sozo, and then as a part of your plan you invited Masako to go on a trip so you could make it look as though she had committed the crime. Isn't that right?" Now, for the first time, Hisafuji's voice was harsh and insistent, and he watched Katsuki closely; but Katsuki's eyes returned Hisafuji's gaze without blinking.

"If you check it out, you'll know whether I hired a murderer or not. I simply took advantage of the fact that Sozo had been murdered to get rid of Masako. That's all. Anyone would try to get away from an insatiable thirty-year-old woman like her. Sure, it's too bad for Masako, but what else was I supposed to do—take her by the neck and throttle her?"

Katsuki's eyes had an empty look and he gave a dry laugh. At this moment Hisafuji remembered Masako's written statement. The woman's single-minded devotion to Katsuki had oozed from each painstakingly written word.

As for Katsuki, he faced the risk of perjury charges, but had committed no real crime in behaving as he had toward Masako; and perhaps it was true that he merely wanted to get away from her. Hisafuji wondered why these cruel misunderstandings happened when people fell in love.

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Hisafuji felt a heavy weight in his stomach. It was the pity he felt for Masako. It also came from the great sense of weariness he felt at having to start the investigation all over again.

MORIYA MASAKO'S STATEMENT—THE SECOND

A chilling drizzle fell again today. It almost seems as though the rainy season will never end this year. Yet from the moment I opened my eyes this morning, my breast was filled with fear and joy. That is because today Katsuki and I will take another of our secret trips alone together.

A month has passed since that dreadful incident, and it is no longer necessary for me to write statements for the police. All the suspicion I was under has been cleared away. Yet somehow I feel compelled to write this, but it is a statement I need not show to anyone—ever.

This time it is a true statement.

I used these very hands to stab my husband while he slept. Everything turned out just as Katsuki and I planned it.

We went to Yamaguchi together. At two in the morning I slipped out of bed and took Katsuki's car which was parked near the inn and returned to Moji. At the same time Katsuki was in the lobby making an alibi for himself. Later, with Kazuko's help, we acted out a little drama that made the police believe my alibi.

Katsuki insisted as strongly as he could that I was asleep at the Azumaya Inn the whole night. But when our relationship became known, his statements did nothing to prove my alibi. We realized that. At the same time, Kazuko is greedy enough to do anything to get her hands on some money; that's the sort of bar hostess she is.

We did a beautiful job of deceiving the police. Since that day every vestige of boredom has left me. From the beginning my instinct was not to flee, but to rely on my wits. If the truth ever does come out, I'll wait until the last possible moment and then kill myself. That way they'll never know the truth, not for sure. Maybe they'll think that Katsuki was an accomplice to the murder, but even if they do, he certainly won't give me away.

Until the day comes when they find out for certain, I'll just pull my scarf low over my face, wear my thick sunglasses, and keep my face averted whenever I go to meet Katsuki. Until the very end, I can't help loving him.

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a *NEW* short story by

SIMON BRETT

Bicycle chain, blue rubber gloves, slip of blue paper—the ritual of murder. Add a churchyard cemetery at 1:15 in the morning. And if it happens to be the 13th of the month . . .

PRIVILEGED INFORMATION

by SIMON BRETT

The woman walked into St. Mary's churchyard at a quarter past one in the morning on the 13th of February, and felt the crackle of money in her coat pocket. It was reassuring, but not reassuring enough. Not enough money, in fact. One five-pound note and four ones. The second man had said he only had four, and, since the job was done and he had threatened to throw her out of the car, she had been in no position to argue.

Just two punters—not a lot for a cold night's work. Two depressed club-crawlers, desperate for their perfunctory relief. She knew she had been working a bad pitch, but the other girls had been around for a long time and had territorial rights. Most of them had protectors to enforce those rights, too. Couldn't expect it to be easy starting up in a new town.

And she'd had to leave London. The size of the rents had driven her out of Soho, and none of the club owners were going to offer her anything now that her looks were gone. It was ironic to think that only eight years before she'd been Big Tony's girl and queened it at the Salamander Club. But disease had wasted Big Tony away to nothing, the Salamander had been sold and reopened as a specialist cinema club, and now she was just a tired old streetwalker trying to make another start.

She'd chosen the town deliberately because of the Thirteenth

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Killer. Since he'd started his reign of terror, it was said that the girls were keeping off the streets. Meant there might be a chance for someone who was brave enough, or desperate enough, to move in and clean up. She was certainly desperate enough; she tried not to think about the need for courage.

But nine pounds for a night's work was hardly cleaning up. The rent on her room was twenty-three pounds a week. And it wasn't even a room she could work from; it was a good couple of miles from the best pickings. Besides, the landlord lived on the premises, and she'd soon be out on her ear if she started bringing men back. She'd tried to get a place on Nelson Avenue, the so-called "Red Light Area," but once again she had been up against a lot of girls with traditional rights. It meant her only chance was working the streets, working in cars, with all the attendant risks.

But she didn't let it depress her. Depression required the exercise of imagination, and that was something she had deliberately avoided all her life. She knew she would survive, and things might get better. That thought wasn't born of optimism—optimism again was a function of imagination—but it was a logical assessment of her chances.

Because now she had another source of income. A chance encounter had opened up new possibilities. Her hard face wrinkled into a smile as her worn-down heels clacked across the path between the tombstones.

She was so engrossed in her thoughts that she didn't see the tall figure detach himself from the yew tree's shadow. Nor did she hear his swift approach across the deadening grass beside the path.

The harsh smile was still on her lips as the brand-new bicycle chain was whipped over her head and snatched tight round her neck. Only a clicking noise came from her mouth as the hands in their blue rubber gloves pulled the chain tighter and tighter.

When she slumped, the tall figure, still maintaining the tension on her neck but keeping at arm's length, started to drag her body across the grass to the yew tree. Here he stopped and continued to pull on the chain with all his strength for a full three minutes.

Then he let the body drop to the ground. She lay dead on her side. He rolled her over onto her back, then the blue rubber fingers deftly straightened the legs and crossed the arms on her chest.

They reached into the pocket of his dark-blue jacket and withdrew a polythene bag. From this they extracted a slip of blue paper. It was two inches long and one inch wide, and had been cut with kitchen scissors from a sheet of Basildon Bond Azure notepaper. In

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the middle of it were three words, typed in capitals by an IBM electric typewriter fitted with a Bookface Academic golf ball.

The three words were: THE THIRTEENTH KILLER. The woman gaped horribly. Pushing down the swollen tongue with one blue rubber finger, he inserted the slip of paper into her mouth.

He looked round to see that there was no one in sight, checked that he had omitted nothing from the ritual with the corpse, then, keeping in the shadows of the wall, moved silently out of the churchyard.

The body would be discovered in the morning. And when the police had examined it, there would be no doubt that the Thirteenth Killer had struck again.

At 1:25 on the morning of the 13th of February, on the other side of St. Mary's churchyard wall, Constable Norton spoke into his walkie-talkie. "Sergeant, just reporting that I've found the front door open at Wainwright's, the newsagents in Lechlade Road. I'm going in to investigate."

The tiny speaker crackled back at him. "Do you want me to get one of the squad cars round?"

"No, don't bother. Mr. Wainwright's an absent-minded old coot at the best of times, and when he's been drinking . . . He's forgotten to lock up more than once before now. I'll go in and check. If I don't call again in fifteen minutes, then send a car round."

"Okay. As you know, we want all cars on the alert tonight for the—"

"Yes, I know, it's the 13th. Cheerio, Sarge."

The whole Police Force knew it was the 13th, the whole town knew, gradually the whole country was getting to know the date's significance.

The other murders had taken place on the 13th, the first two only a month apart, and then the third after a three-month gap. It had taken three murders for the pattern to become clear, three murders before the police got a special Thirteenth Squad organized to investigate, before the press caught on and some reporter came up with the name, the Thirteenth Killer, to swell the headlines.

Since then, nothing. Nine months had passed and vigilance naturally relaxed. The streetwalkers were slowly coming out again. It was Constable Norton's belief that the Thirteenth Killer wouldn't strike again. The increased police effort, the publicity, it had all scared him off.

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For nine months every cop in the town had been on the alert, his head ringing with "privileged information." That's what the Superintendent in charge of the Thirteenth Squad had called it—"privileged information." They all knew about the stranglings with a bicycle chain, the laying out of the bodies, the macabre message in the mouth on Basildon Bond Azure notepaper, typed by a Bookface Academic golf ball. They even knew about the blue rubber gloves, which had left traces on the chains.

And they all knew they must never give away any of this privileged information. Not to their wives, not to their lovers, not to their priests, not to anyone. There was always the danger of some nut trying to carbon-copy murder.

Constable Norton didn't expect a carbon-copy murder by a nut, any more than he expected another genuine attack. In his view, the case was over, done and over.

And, increasingly, the rest of the Force was coming round to his opinion. Oh, some of the young ones—like Constable Tate—still believed there'd be another murder. Tate obviously thought he was going to solve the case single-handed; he kept volunteering for nights down round Nelson Avenue, even snooping there when he was off-duty. He saw himself as the great hero who was going to nail the Thirteenth Killer. He was young and ambitious.

Norton remembered when he had been like that, when he'd joined the Force and was serving his first few years in London. Seemed a long time ago. Anyway, he'd had to leave London. And he was better off here. Nice quiet manor most of the time, even a good chance of promotion. Married a few years back, two kids. Not as much money as back in the London days, but safer.

It took him five minutes to reach Wainwright's, the newsagents.

The door was locked, but he had a key that fitted. As he raised it to the lock, he noticed he was still wearing the blue rubber gloves.

They were safely in his trousers pocket when he knocked on Mr. Wainwright's bedroom door. The old man took a bit of rousing from his alcohol-induced slumbers. He opened the door, halfheartedly clutching a poker, still too bleary even to be frightened.

"Don't worry, Mr. Wainwright. It's only me, Constable Norton."

The old man grunted, uncomprehending.

"You left your front door unlocked again."

"Oh. I thought I'd—"

"Well, you hadn't. Less of the bottle and a bit more concentration,

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me old lad, or you'll have all the villains in the area helping themselves to your takings."

"Yes, I—" The old man's head was aching. "What time is it?"

Norton flashed a look at his watch, deducted nine minutes, and said, "One twenty-six."

"Ah. I . . . should I come down and—?"

"No, no, I'll slip the latch. Don't worry. You just get back to bed. But don't let it happen again, eh?"

"No, I—er—" But given permission to go back to bed, the old man was already on his way. As he slumped under the covers, he mumbled "Thank you," and immediately started breathing deeply. Norton waited a couple of minutes until the breathing had swelled to snores, then went back down to the shop.

That's the advantage of being a good cop, he thought wryly—knowing all the people in your manor, knowing who drinks too much, who's on sleeping pills, who's likely to be a bit vague about time.

He slipped the latch on the door and checked that it was firmly locked, then looked at his watch. Twelve minutes since his last call to the station.

"Sergeant, Constable Norton. All okay at Wainwright's. As I thought, old fool had been hitting the bottle and forgot to lock up. So I gave him a telling-off and he's gone back to bed."

"Okay, Norton. Thanks for calling in. And don't forget, it's the 13th. Keep a lookout for—"

"Yes, Sarge, of course." A brief pause. "You know, I don't think it's going to happen again."

"Don't tell anyone on the Thirteenth Squad, Norton, but, actually, neither do I."

As he paced his beat, Constable Norton went through what he had to do. The main thing was to keep calm, and he didn't think that would be a problem. He'd been calm enough when he'd pocketed the Bookface Academic golf ball from that insurance office where there'd been a break-in. He'd been calm enough when he'd sent his son out to buy a bicycle chain, and calm enough when he'd said he'd broken it and sent the boy out for another. He'd been calm when he'd asked his wife to buy some rubber gloves for cleaning the car.

Come to that, he'd been calm enough while he killed the woman.

And he knew he'd had to do that. He'd been over the problem

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many times in the last three weeks, and he couldn't see any other way round it.

He'd thought, when he got transferred from the Metropolitan, he was okay. The bribery inquiries were getting close, but not close enough. He reckoned he got out just in time.

He'd been lucky, too. The only person who could really point the finger at him was Big Tony, and Big Tony had died just at the most convenient moment. So Norton had started in the new town with a clean slate, and seemed to be making a success of it.

Or rather, he was making a success of it until he picked up the woman for soliciting. Her recognition of him had been instantaneous, and she'd come up with far too much detail of meetings at the Salamander Club, dates, times, the sums of money involved. What he'd expected to be a quick trip down to the station to charge her had ended with him pleading and agreeing to a hundred-pound payoff the next night.

There had been another payoff each week since then. Three hundred quid. That was a lot on his pay. The wife hadn't yet realized what was happening to their savings; when she did, he'd have to invent some story about losing it on the horses.

But it couldn't go on like that. The woman was likely to get more greedy rather than less. She was used to a lot of money from her days with Big Tony, and the idea of bleeding it from a cop was one that would appeal to her.

It was after the first payoff that he had thought of the Thirteenth Killer idea, and the more he thought about it, the better it seemed.

The woman was, after all, an ideal victim. Shiftless, unattached, a prostitute like the others. A second-class citizen, the sort whom most of the population righteously reckoned invited danger by her choice of work. No one would mourn her, and so long as the details of the murder were right, no one would be suspected, except for the Thirteenth Killer. The press would have a field day, the streetwalkers would disappear for a few weeks, and one more unsolved murder would join a sequence that Norton was sure had already stopped.

So he just had to keep calm, and it would be all right. Sure, he'd be questioned, because the murder had taken place on his turf; but he knew who'd do the questioning and he knew they'd be sympathetic. The Thirteenth Killer had made a point of strangling the other women in well-patrolled areas, but no one on the Force wanted to draw attention to this. The police were already looking inept enough, as the deaths accumulated.

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No, it would be all right.

He didn't think the body would be found till daylight. A lot of commuters went through St. Mary's churchyard on their way to the station. Norton went off duty at six, so he didn't expect he'd be called to the scene of the crime.

The only important thing he had to do was to get rid of the blue rubber gloves. And that had to be managed with care. He knew enough about the workings of the forensic boys—once again his "privileged information" was helping—to realize the traces he might have left on the gloves—prints, minute hairs, a whole collection of microscopic clues that could link him to the murder.

He also knew, from his own tedious experience, the detail of the police searches that would follow the discovery of the woman's body. To dispose of the gloves anywhere on his beat would have been too risky.

But he had planned for that, too. He felt a glow of satisfaction as he contemplated the extent of his planning.

The gloves had to be burned. Burned with intense heat until they congealed, melted, and were consumed.

And they were going to be burned in the one place where police investigators would never dream of looking.

He continued evenly pacing his beat.

It wasn't yet light at 6:15 when he approached the back entrance of the police station. The welcome blast of heat from the antiquated radiators greeted him as he walked inside.

He smiled at the irony. The heating system at the station had long been scheduled for modernization, but the work kept being delayed. And as long as it was delayed, the old coal-fired furnace kept roaring away in the basement. Right next to the constables' locker room.

All he had to do was go downstairs and slip the gloves into the furnace. There'd be nobody around. The other constables would have nipped into the locker room sharp at six and already be on their way home or warming up with cups of tea in the canteen.

As he walked along toward the basement stairs, a WPC came rushing along the corridor. "Sensible lad, Norton," she said, "coming in the back way."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't get through the reporters at the front."

"Eh?"

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"Haven't you heard? The Thirteenth Killer's struck again!"

And she hurried on.

He assessed how hard the news had hit him. So someone had found the woman's body earlier than he had expected. So his interrogation would come that much earlier.

But it didn't worry him. He still felt calm.

Just get rid of the gloves, and he could cope.

He had started down the stairs when Constable Tate came bursting out of the Operations Room. The youth was transformed. He walked ten feet tall and positively glowed with triumph. "Norton," he shouted, "have you heard?"

The urge to get down to the furnace was strong, but Norton curbed it. Act naturally, and everything will be all right.

He managed a wry grin. "Yes, Tate, I've heard. The Thirteenth Killer has struck again. I take it all back. You were right and I was wrong."

"Thank you. Very decent of you to say so."

"So now all that remains is for us to find him."

"But we have!"

"What?"

"Or rather *I* have."

"You . . .?"

"I was patrolling Nelson Avenue at half-past twelve and I actually saw the attack. Had to chase him for miles, but I got him! Caught him absolutely red- —no, get it right—caught him *blue*-handed! Isn't it great news? He's in the—here, are you all right?"

Norton was not all right. The shock hit him like a punch in the stomach and he threw up instantly.

"Good God, Norton. Have you got a handkerchief? Let me mop you up."

"No, I—"

But Norton was too weak to stop Constable Tate from reaching into Norton's trouser pocket. He just swayed feebly against the wall as the young man drew out the rolled pair of blue rubber gloves.

It was at that moment that everyone came rushing out of the Operations Room with news of another sensation.

A woman's body had been found in St. Mary's churchyard.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Dr. Sam Hawthorne, the retired general practitioner of Northmont, New England, riffles the pages of his memorybook, back half a century to the Prohibition Era, and recaptures the spirit of place and the place of spirits. The crooked path beckoned strongly in those days, but the paths of crime and detection crossed—and sometimes doublecrossed . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE BOOTLEGGER'S CAR

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Wait till I open a new bottle," Dr. Sam Hawthorne was saying. "We can't have a story without a small—ah—libation. You know, looking at this bottle brings back so many memories. You were too young for Prohibition, of course, but I was around for it. You might think we'd escaped the worst of the gang wars up in Northmont, in the peaceful New England countryside, but let me tell you—in the spring of 1930 we had a dilly of a one! It was all over a shipment of empty barrels—yes, I said empty—and it involved an impossible disappearance from a bootlegger's car that I had to solve, quite literally, to save my own life.

"But it all began with my kidnaping . . ."

It was a Saturday morning in early May (Dr. Sam continued), and I was down at my office getting out some bills. My nurse April had gone off to visit her sister in Florida—a journey of some magnitude in those days—and I'd been left to cope with things as best I could

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for three weeks' time. I was just finishing up my chores, putting stamps on some of the bills I wanted to mail out, when I heard the little bell on the outside door signal the arrival of a patient. Since none was scheduled, I went to see who it was.

A man in a pin-stripe suit and a brown fedora hat stood in the center of my waiting room, pointing a long-barreled revolver at me. "Dr. Hawthorne?"

"That's right. What's the gun for?"

"You're comin' with me, Doc. We got an injured man."

"If there's an injured man you don't need a gun. I'll get my bag."

He followed me into the inner office, the gun still in his hand. I collected some extra rolls of bandages and stuffed them into my bag, having a pretty good idea of the nature of the injury. But I asked anyway. "What's the matter with him?"

"Gunshot wounds."

"More than one?"

"Just one that's bad. Come on, cut the talk!"

I snapped my bag shut and walked out the door in front of him. "Make sure you lock it," I cautioned him. "There are lots of crooks around these days."

"You being a wise guy?" he asked.

"Not a bit."

There was another man waiting outside at the wheel of the car, a closed black sedan. I could see that his right hand was inside his jacket, no doubt clutching another gun. I didn't feel scared. I felt more like a character in a Class B gangster movie.

"Get in!" the one behind me ordered, giving me a shove.

I glanced around, but the alley behind my office was deserted on a Saturday morning and I didn't really expect anyone from the nearby houses would notice my predicament. I slid into the back seat of the car as ordered, and said to my captor, "Do you have a name I can call you? It looks as if we'll be together for a few hours."

"Phil," the man with the gun said. "That's Marty behind the wheel. He don't talk much."

"Where are we going?"

"A farmhouse just outside of town. Fat Larry rented it."

"Fat Larry?"

He nudged me with the revolver. "Your patient. But don't ask too many questions, Doc. It's not good for your health."

I remembered a name from the newspapers. "Would that be Fat Larry Spears? The bootlegger?"

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"I told you not to ask questions, Doc. You want to come back from this trip alive, don't you?"

I fell silent, thinking about Fat Larry Spears. He controlled most of the illegal whiskey flowing into Boston and Providence, according to the press, and was rumored to have killed a half-dozen men. His own life had been on the line countless times, and it was a known fact that the New York mobs had a price on his head. They wanted control of bootlegging in the entire northeast, with no interference from independent operators like Fat Larry.

We were some miles out of town, bumping along the Old Ridge Road in the spring sunshine, when Marty finally turned off into a weed-choked driveway. I recognized the farmhouse at once as the old Haskins place, abandoned since the death of the last unmarried brother a year earlier. If Fat Larry Spears was renting it he probably wasn't paying much. The house was near a crossroads, and I supposed it might make a good meeting place for bootleggers.

I entered the place between Marty and Phil, with the gun still at my back. As we approached, the door was flung open by a slim dark-haired woman with a pretty face. "He still won't let me look at the wound," she told them, "but there's blood all over! Is this the doctor?"

"I'm Sam Hawthorne," I said. "How long ago did it happen?"

She glanced at the gunman. "What was it, Phil? Around nine?"

"Yeah. They were waiting for him in the bushes near the road. When he came out the door they started firing. We came for you right away."

"Let's see him." I was already opening my bag as I followed her into a first-floor bedroom.

It was Fat Larry Spears, all right, though at the moment he didn't look much like the dapper newspaper photos. He was curled into a ball on the bed, clutching at his stomach and abdomen, writhing in pain. There was blood on the sheets and on his shirt, and I could see an additional flesh wound in his upper left arm.

"I'm the doctor," I announced. "Let's take a look at you."

He rolled over, grimacing, and told the woman, "Leave us alone, Kitty. I don't want you to see it."

"For God's sake, Larry—"

"You heard me!" he shouted. "Out!"

She went out with the two men and closed the door, leaving me alone with my patient. "Take your hands away and let me see it," I instructed him.

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He straightened out at once and his shirt fell open, revealing a hairy but unmarked stomach. There was no wound.

But there was a little .22 automatic just inches away from my head.

"Don't make a sound," Fat Larry Spears cautioned me. "No yelling."

"I didn't intend to," I answered quietly. "I came to fix your wounds."

"There's one in my arm, that's all. It's just a flesh wound. Take care of that and then we'll talk."

"You don't need that gun."

But he kept it there. "How do I know you're a doctor?"

"Hell, how do I know you're a bootlegger?"

"Wise guy, huh?"

"No wiser than you." I went to work on the arm. "You're thinner than you look in the papers. How come they call you Fat Larry?"

"I used to be fat. I lost weight. That's what saved my life this morning." He rolled over on the bed, revealing a thickly padded vest he'd hidden beneath his body. "I started losing weight a year ago, but I decided to keep it a secret. In this business, with half the guns in New York after me, I figured I might need to change my appearance in a hurry some day. So I started wearing padding around my stomach and stuffed a little cotton into my cheeks. I looked about like I had before, except that I was fifty pounds lighter."

The bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his arm, and it was only a matter of taking a couple of stitches. "This'll hurt," I warned. "You should go into the hospital."

"Go ahead and do it, Doc. I won't shoot you."

"I certainly hope not." I went to work as he gritted his teeth. "But why keep your weight loss from those people outside?"

"Because one of them is an informer. One of them has been tipping off the New York mob to everything I do. That's why there was a gunman waiting in the bushes this morning. Only those three knew I was up here. Luckily my stomach padding stopped the bullet, but the impact knocked me over and I decided to pretend I was badly wounded. If they think I'm on the way out I might be able to catch the guilty one off guard. Understand?"

"Kitty must know you've lost weight," I said.

He snorted. "You think I sleep with her? That was over a year

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ago. She just hangs around now for what she can get outa me. Maybe she decided she can get more outa the New York boys."

"All finished," I announced, patting his arm. "You were lucky. When you get back to Boston or wherever, you should have that checked by your own doctor."

"One more thing, Doc."

"What's that?"

"I gotta keep you here with me, till tonight."

"What?"

"You heard me. You know I'm here and you know I'm not badly wounded. The police would be interested in the first fact, and the people who shot me would be interested in the second. You've got to stay here till my business is finished tonight."

"What business is that?"

"I have to take delivery of a shipment of barrels."

"Booze?"

"No, just barrels. All I'm promised is that they'll be here by sundown." He paused and looked at me. "They're valuable."

I buttoned his shirt up again and remarked on all the blood. "Did this all come from your arm?"

The familiar waxen face actually smiled. "Yeah. I soaked the blood into my shirt so it would look more like a chest wound. That was fast thinking if I say so myself."

"If it keeps you alive I won't disagree."

"What's the local police setup here, Doc?"

"Sheriff Lens has a few deputies, but they never patrol up this way. You shouldn't be bothered."

"Good! Now you tell the others I'm gonna pull through but I'll have to stay in bed. Got that?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell them not to let you go till the truck gets here. You play your cards right and you'll get out of this alive." He raised his voice and shouted, "Marty! Phil!"

The driver and the gunman immediately appeared. "How you feelin', Larry?"

"I'll live, the doc tells me."

I nodded, getting to my feet and starting to gather up my equipment. "He's a lucky man. He's very weak and he'd better stay in bed, but the bullet missed any vital areas. If he doesn't develop an infection he should be back on his feet in a month or so."

"Keep the doc here till the truck arrives," Spears told the two

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men, making his voice sounding suddenly weak. "I said we'd let him go after that."

"Right, Larry," Phil said. "Let's go, Doc."

"And send Kitty in here," the man in the bed ordered.

The farmhouse was sparsely furnished, but there were a table and chairs in the front room. Phil motioned me to sit down and then said to Kitty, "Your turn. He wants you."

She turned to me. "How is he?"

"Weak, but he'll live."

Her face was a mask as she turned and went into the bedroom, closing the door behind her. Phil sat down at the table. He'd taken off his suit coat and returned the revolver to its shoulder holster. "How about some cards, Doc? You play gin rummy?"

"Sure," I replied, "but what about Marty?"

"He don't play."

"Does he ever speak?"

Phil looked up at the burly driver. "Say something for the doc, Marty. He don't think you can talk."

"I can talk," a voice rasped.

"My God, what's the matter with his throat?"

"He got some bad booze. Burned his throat and nearly killed him. Back in the early days they were selling anything they could put in bottles. Some still do, for that matter."

I couldn't help wondering if Marty might blame Fat Larry Spears somehow for the booze that had ruined his throat. Had he kept on working for Spears only until he could get his revenge by betraying Fat Larry to the New York crowd?

But here I was acting like a detective again, and there was no reason to. The truck loaded with the mysterious barrels would arrive soon and then everyone would depart. Since they hadn't killed me yet I was pretty sure Spears meant it about letting me live.

As Phil dealt the cards I asked, "Who do you think shot Larry?"

He shrugged. "Some hired gun from the New York mob."

"How would he know Larry was up here?"

"Followed us, I suppose. Or else he heard it from Tony Barrel."

"Who?"

"Tony Barrello. Everybody calls him Tony Barrel because that's what he sells—barrels. He's makin' the delivery today."

"Tell me, what's in these barrels?"

"Nothing. Nothing but air."

"Larry said they were valuable."

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Phil scooped up his cards, but Marty was standing there peering over his shoulder. "Go outside, Marty," he ordered. "Watch for the truck." When the burly man had gone, he said, "Guy gets on my nerves. Always so damned quiet. Never know what he's thinkin'. Where were we?"

"The barrels."

"Yeah."

"Larry said they were valuable."

"Well, they cost sixty bucks each and there are supposed to be two hundred of them on the truck. That's twelve thousand dollars."

"Sixty dollars each for empty barrels?"

"These are special," Phil said with a smile. "You'll see."

We played two games of gin and he won both times. We were just starting a third game when Kitty came out of the bedroom. "He's hungry," she said. "I'm going to make him a sandwich."

Phil glanced at me. "You're not supposed to eat with a stomach wound, are you?"

"Well, the bullet didn't actually hit his stomach. It's all right if he eats a little."

She went off to the kitchen, where they apparently had a small stock of cold meat and bread. "Make me one too," Phil yelled to her. "And Marty's probably gettin' hungry. It's after one already."

Kitty brought in a plate of sandwiches, moving with a languid grace that made me guess she'd once been a cocktail waitress. "Where were all of you when Larry was shot this morning?" I asked casually.

"Kitty was fixin' breakfast," Phil replied, studying his cards with a frown. "Marty and I were still in bed. We didn't get in till past midnight. I was just wakin' up when I heard the shots."

"How many?"

"Three or four, I guess."

"Four," Kitty said. "There were four shots. By the time I got to the door Larry was down on the steps, trying to crawl back inside. There was no sign of the gunman. Larry said the shots came from the bushes near the road."

"He must have been expecting trouble if he brought you guys along," I commented.

"Larry always expects trouble," Kitty agreed. "Especially when he's dealing with people like Tony Barrel. Tony deals with the New York mob. You never know whose side he's on."

As the afternoon wore on I began to get restless, wondering if

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anyone had yet noticed my absence. Probably not, I decided. It was a Saturday, when I only had limited office hours, and April was on vacation. Sheriff Lens might drop by to see me, but he'd think nothing of my absence.

At three o'clock I got to my feet, saying, "I'd beter have a look at my patient."

"I think he's sleeping," Kitty said.

"I'll just peek in."

I opened the door and looked in. Fat Larry was in bed with his eyes closed, but they snapped open at once. I knew his hand beneath the covers would be clutching the .22 automatic. "What is it?" he asked. "Is the truck here?"

I stepped inside and shut the door behind me.

"Not yet. I just wanted to see how you're getting on."

He gave me a hard smile. "Pretty good for a man with a bullet in his belly. Are they suspicious?"

"They don't seem to be. But where is all this leading? Do you think one of them might try to finish you off?"

"Might be. Let's see what happens when Tony Barrel arrives."

I went back out to join the others. By that time I think we were all getting tired of waiting, but before Phil could deal another hand of gin rummy Marty came in from outside.

"Car and truck coming," he said in his raspy voice.

Phil was on his feet at once, reaching for his holstered weapon. "Cover the back, Marty—just in case it's some sort of trick." Then, to Kitty, "Tell Larry they're coming."

Kitty went into the bedroom and returned at once with a message. "He says we're to bring Tony Barrel in there so he can close the deal and give him the money for the shipment."

Phil nodded and went to the door. I looked through the window, watching a rise of dust approach us along the dirt road. A car pulled into the driveway first, followed by a large long truck with a tarpaulin-covered cargo. Interested as I was in this mysterious cargo of empty barrels, it was the car that caught my attention. It was a black Packard limousine with shades drawn on the rear windows. A thin man of medium height with a pock-marked face slid out from behind the wheel. Like Phil, he wore a dark suit and a wide-brimmed fedora, but the suit seemed somehow too big for him.

"That's Scoop Turner, Tony's driver," Phil told me. "And there's Tony Barrel himself."

Scoop opened the rear door and a stout bearded man emerged. If

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he wasn't quite shaped like a barrel, he was certainly large, and somehow the bushy black beard and slouch hat gave him an undeservedly squat appearance. While his driver lounged against the car, Tony Barrel walked quickly up the steps to the front door.

Phil holstered his gun and opened the door. "Hello, Tony. Good to see you again."

Tony Barrel's steel-gray eyes covered the room at a glance, passing quickly over Kitty and stopping at me. "Who's this?" he asked.

"A local sawbones. Larry got hurt."

I extended my hand. "Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Pleased to meet you, Tony."

"Yeah." He took my hand and gave it a limp shake. I couldn't help noticing that he wore a diamond ring shaped like a barrel. "What's the matter with Larry?"

"Somebody shot him," Phil answered before I could reply. "But the doc says he'll pull through. We got him in the back room here and he wants to see you about the shipment."

"He better do more than see me. He better give me twelve grand plus the fee for the truck."

"He's got it for you."

"He bring a driver?"

"Marty's around back."

Tony Barrel snorted. "That hophead!"

"Is your guy any better?" Phil glanced out the window. "What in hell's he doin' wavin' that shotgun around?"

"Protectin' the cargo," Tony Barrel said.

I went to the window to take a look. The driver of the truck had gotten out and was standing like a soldier on guard with a double-barreled shotgun. Kitty came over to my side. "That's Charlie Hello with the gun. He's part Indian or something. About like Marty. They're good with a gun and that's all."

"What makes those barrels so valuable?"

"Come on out and I'll show you."

We waited while Tony Barrel was shown into Larry Spears's sick room. I heard Larry greet him in a weak voice. "Tony, my old friend! They tried to kill me but I'm a tough one." Then Tony closed the door.

I followed Kitty outside while Phil went around back to get Marty. Barrel's driver, Scoop Turner, was still lounging against the Packard, but he stirred as we approached. "Why do they call him Scoop?" I asked Kitty.

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"He used to be a reporter out in Chicago, but he decided he could make more money working for the mob. He's always after the bucks." Then, in a louder voice, she greeted him. "How's tricks, Scoop?"

He gave her a sleepy grin. "Hello, Kitty. Still knocking them dead?"

"Sure, Scoop." She explained to me, "I was in burlesque for a while in Chicago. Scoop reviewed my act one night, didn't you, Scoop?"

"I loved it."

"Can we look at Tony's car?"

He shrugged and opened the back door. With the shades drawn the interior was dim, but there was a ceiling light that cast a soft glow over the fancy leather upholstery. Tucked into the pocket behind the front seat was a sawed-off shotgun. Scoop opened the driver's door and rested his arms on the back of the front seat, watching Kitty's reaction. "Pretty classy, huh?"

"Why does he ride with the shades down?"

"Too many people tryin' to get a shot at him. This way they can't tell if he's in the car or not. See, my side glass in front is smoked too. Only the front windshield is clear glass."

"Bulletproof?"

"So they say, but I wouldn't like to try it with a Tommygun."

Kitty and I continued walking toward the truck and Scoop Turner closed the car doors. He wandered off toward the side of the house. "I'm sorry you had to get involved in this business," Kitty told me as we walked. "But I made Larry promise you wouldn't be harmed. We'll release you as soon as Tony Barrel and his men leave."

With Phil and Marty both around the back of the house, I wondered if I could make a run for it then, but I decided against it. The truck driver, Charlie Hello, still had his shotgun out and I didn't know when he might decide to use it. He might like to practise on a running target.

"It's me, Charlie—Kitty. You remember me, don't you?"

If he did he showed no sign of it. Instead, he slipped his finger through the trigger guard of the shotgun and said, "Stay away from the truck."

"We just want to look at the barrels, Charlie. We won't hurt anything."

His eyes were sleepy, possibly from drugs. They followed our movements around the truck but the warning was not repeated. Kitty lifted the tarpaulin and showed me the wooden barrels. One row

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was upended and I could see they were empty. "They're not even new," I commented. "The insides look like they've been charred."

"Of course they're charred, silly! That's what makes them so valuable. Tony Barrel buys them from distilleries in Canada. They're charred barrels in which whiskey has been aged. You fill them with denatured alcohol and let it stand for a few weeks. It absorbs the flavor of the whiskey and comes out tasting like Scotch or rye or bourbon or whatever was in the barrels originally."

"Where does the denatured alcohol come from?"

"The government allows it to be sold to certain manufacturing firms. In some cases poisonous chemicals are added, but the alcohol used in making hair tonic—for example—is nauseating but not deadly. A chemist can rectify or purify it by repeated distillation, removing the nauseating substance. The pure alcohol is left in these barrels a few weeks, and it tastes just like the real thing."

"Amazing!"

"Just one of the tricks of the trade."

"I thought Larry Spears was selling whiskey he smuggled across the border."

"He is, but demand is outstripping his supply. Besides, he needs more money, the way his gambling debts keep rising."

"There comes Tony Barrel," I said. The door of the farmhouse had opened and the stout bearded man emerged just as Phil and Marty came around the corner of the house.

"Get the money, Tony?" Phil called out.

"Yeah," he mumbled. "The truck's yours." His bare right hand reached out and opened the limousine's rear door. He climbed inside.

"Take the truck, Marty," Phil ordered, and Marty started trotting toward it.

Then something happened.

Charlie Hello, his mind fogged with drink or drugs, saw Marty running toward him and must have thought he was being attacked. He swung the shotgun around and fired in Marty's general direction. Marty hit the ground, skidding in the dust, and pulled a snub-nosed revolver from under his coat. He fired three fast shots from the ground as another booming roar came from Charlie's shotgun.

Then Charlie Hello toppled backward against the fender of the truck and went down. "Stop shooting, for God's sake!" Phil yelled, running forward with his own gun drawn. Kitty and I were still on the far side of Tony Barrel's limousine, between it and the farmhouse. Scoop Turner was coming out from the driver's seat, pulling

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a gun of his own. For an instant I feared he'd open fire on Phil and Marty from behind, but he hesitated, unsure of what to do. He was staring down at the left hand front tire of his car, and I could see from my side that it was flat. One of Charlie's shotgun blasts had hit it.

"Doc, I think he's dead," Phil yelled at me. "Come take a look."

"Stay here," I cautioned Kitty and started forward.

Marty was still standing with his gun out, staring at the body on the ground. "He shot first," he rasped. "He tried to kill me."

"All he hit was my tire," Scoop Turner said. "Let's everybody put the guns away."

I confirmed that Marty's bullets had killed Charlie Hello and then straightened up.I was staring at the limousine, but Tony Barrel hadn't yet emerged. Remembering the shotgun he had in the back seat, I decided we should speak to him before he did something foolish over the death of his truck driver.

"Where you goin'?" Phil asked me.

"Just to see Tony," I answered, and opened the rear door of the car.

The back seat of the limousine was empty.

The front seat was empty.

While Charlie Hello and Marty were shooting it out, Tony Barrel had disappeared.

"Where is he?" Kitty asked. "He didn't leave the car."

"He left it, all right," I said. "He's gone."

"He can't be gone!" Scoop Turner insisted. He pushed by me and looked for himself. Phil and Marty came up for a look too.

"He musta gone back in the house when the shooting started," Phil suggested.

"He didn't go in the house because I'd have seen him!" Kitty insisted. "So would the rest of you, shooting or no shooting! It's thirty feet to the house and Tony's not exactly the invisible man, you know."

"I'll settle this by taking a look inside," I said, and ran toward the house. I went in through the front door, fully expecting to see Tony Barrel cowering behind a chair. But the front room was empty.

I went into the ground-floor bedroom, wondering if Larry Spears would be among the missing too. But he was sitting up in bed, pointing his little .22 at the door. He looked pale and frightened. "What was that shooting?" he asked. "Cops?"

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"No such luck. Marty killed their truck driver, Charlie Hello."

"Small loss."

"But this is a big loss. During the shooting Tony Barrel vanished from his car."

"What do you mean, vanished?"

"Just that. We saw him get into the car and now he's gone."

Larry Spears lowered his gun. "Well, go find him. I can't come out and let them know my stomach wound was a fake. One of them is still trying to get me."

"I'll be back," I promised.

Outside, Kitty was pawing at the car's upholstery, looking for any sort of hidden compartment large enough to hide a man. But the limousine seemed solid enough. I had Scoop unlock the trunk but there was nothing in it except a spare tire and some tools.

"Where is he?" Phil asked me.

"I wish I knew. He's not inside the house and Larry doesn't know a thing."

We walked around the house and then around the truck, looking for a clue, but there was none. We searched Larry's car and then began looking through the empty barrels on the truck. There was no way he could have gotten inside them without someone seeing him, but we looked anyway.

Twenty minutes later we were ready to admit defeat. Tony Barrel was gone.

"I know the fast way to find out where he is," Phil said, drawing the gun from his shoulder holster. He turned and pointed it at Scoop. "We all saw him get in the car, Scoop. You gotta know what happened."

"Nothing happened!" the ex-reporter insisted.

"Did he say anything to you?" I asked.

"He just told me to pick up Charlie and get moving. But then the shooting started and my tire got hit."

"Charlie was going back in the limousine?"

"Sure, up front with me. Spears bought the truck and everything."

"For twelve thousand dollars cash," I reminded them all. "Tony Barrel had that money in his pocket, and it might have been enough of a motive for any one of you."

"You're saying one of us killed him?" Kitty asked. "But how?"

"I don't know," I admitted.

"To hell with Tony," Phil decided. "Whether he's dead or alive, Charlie Hello is dead. And we've got to make tracks out of here

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before someone comes along. That truckload of barrels is still worth money."

The others agreed, but Scoop Turner asked, "What about the body?"

"We'll take it with us," Phil decided. "Inside one of the barrels. It'll be a lot easier to dump along the way, off a bridge somewhere."

Turner pointed at me. "And what about him?"

"I guess he knows a little too much," Phil said bluntly.

"Wait a minute!" Kitty spoke sharply, stepping in front of Phil before he could draw his weapon, if that was his intention. "Larry promised he wouldn't be harmed!"

"For all we know Larry might be dying. And where will that leave us?"

"The doc doesn't know anything. He doesn't even know our last names."

"He knows mine," Scoop Turner said. "What am I supposed to do? Charlie is dead and the boss has disappeared."

"What are you supposed to do?" Phil said. "Tell us what you did with him, that's what!"

I held up my hands to quiet them. "You won't get anywhere fighting among yourselves. The way things stand now, the police would probably arrest the whole bunch of you. They've got Charlie's body and they might come up with Tony's too if they look hard enough."

"Is he dead?" Kitty asked.

"I expect he is. Now do you all want to go to prison for it or do you want me to name the murderer?"

"It's one of us?"

"It's the same person who shot Larry Spears at that front door this morning. In fact, you might say that Larry's shooting was part of the same crime."

"Do you know where Tony's body is?"

"Yes."

"All right," Phil agreed. "You produce Tony's body and tell us who killed him—and how—and we'll let you go. How's that for a deal, Doc?"

I nodded. "Let's go into Larry's room. He's well enough to hear this too."

They all followed me inside, leaving Charlie Hello's body sprawled where it had fallen. There hadn't been another car along the road all afternoon, but I knew that Sheriff Lens sometimes drove up this

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way late in the day. There was always a chance someone might have heard the shooting and called in a report of illegal hunting.

Larry Spears brought his gun out as we entered. "What is this? What do you all want?"

"We made a bargain," I explained. "I go free if I can produce Tony Barrel's body. And his murderer."

"How can you be sitting up with that terrible wound?" Kitty asked him. "When I was in before you were half dead."

"There's a lot of things that need explaining," Phil agreed. I could see his fingers twitching to draw his gun. "But if Tony Barrel is dead this is the only person who could have killed him." He pointed at Scoop Turner, who was beginning to look frightened.

Larry Spears shifted his gun in Turner's direction. "And he could have driven up here this morning and taken that shot at me!"

I saw his finger whitening on the trigger and knew I had to move fast. I threw myself on the bed, knocking his arm aside just as the gun went off. The bullet hit the ceiling and I wrested the gun free before he could fire again. "Phil!" Spears shouted from beneath me. "Kill him! Kill them both!"

"Oh, no!" I said. "Phil won't kill me or Scoop, because he wants to hear where the body is."

"Where is it?" Kitty demanded.

I kept a firm grip on Larry Spears. "Under this bed, and Spears is the one who put it there!"

As I spoke, Scoop Turner was edging toward the door. But Marty moved in silently to block his passage. "That's right," I said. "Hang onto him. We'll be needing him."

"Then Scoop is involved too?" Kitty asked.

I nodded, pulling up the rumpled bedclothes to reveal Tony Barrel's body where I said it would be. "Larry killed him, but he couldn't have worked it without Scoop's help. You said Scoop was always after the bucks, and Larry must have bought him out some time back. Tony Barrel was murdered in this room." I looked more closely at the newly revealed body. "Strangled with a thin wire. He never left the house. It was Scoop, wearing a false beard and stomach padding, who walked to the car and got in. He and Tony were wearing a similar suit and hat, and I'd noticed earlier how loose-fitting his clothes were."

"I don't understand this at all," Kitty protested. "You said the same person killed Tony that shot Larry this morning."

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"Exactly! Larry shot himself. I've known since I first arrived that there was no stomach wound, but I didn't guess until a short time ago that the arm wound was self-inflicted. There never was any gunman in the bushes."

"But why?" Kitty asked. "What was his motive in shooting himself, killing Tony, and arranging this vanishing-man act?"

"He shot himself as a means of luring Tony to the bedroom where Tony could be killed. Otherwise they would most likely have met outside or in the company of the rest of you. And he killed Tony, quite simply, because he didn't have the twelve thousand dollars to pay for the shipment of barrels, which he desperately needed. As for the vanishing man, it was never planned that way."

"What do you mean, never planned that way?" Phil wanted to know.

"Maybe I'd better describe the crime from the beginning," I suggested, "so you can see what was planned and where it went wrong. Larry needed those barrels to manufacture artificial whiskey, which could be sold at a big profit. He arranged to buy them from Tony, as we know, for twelve thousand dollars. But somewhere along the line he ran out of money—right, Larry? Kitty said you've been gambling heavily lately. There's no way you short-change a man like Tony Barrel without starting a gang war, so you knew you had to kill him—in such a manner that you'd be completely free from suspicion.

"You arranged to bribe Scoop at some previous time, probably for a thousand bucks or whatever you could scrape together. This morning you walked outside the door and shot yourself in the fleshy part of the arm with that .22. There was plenty of blood and you pretended you'd been hit in the stomach as well. It was easy to fire the pistol through a cloth of some sort so there'd be no powder burns around the wound. And you knew a .22 slug wouldn't do much damage."

"He told you his stomach wound was a fake?" Kitty asked.

"He had to. There was no way he could keep you from summoning a doctor. The superficial arm wound alone wouldn't keep him in bed, and being in bed was essential to his plan. He had to lure Tony Barrel into this room, alone, to strangle him. Meanwhile he told me he suspected one of you three of tipping off the New York mob to his whereabouts, but that was just a red herring for my benefit. So Tony came in here alone to get his payment, and maybe Larry even asked him to bend over the bed to hear his whispered voice. He strangled Tony with this wire—"

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"Strangled a strong man like Tony when he had a bullet wound in one arm?" Kitty asked.

"The wound is in his left arm, and he still had all the strength of his right arm. And with the element of surprise this wire noose wouldn't need that much strength."

"Where did Scoop Turner come in?"

"Through the window, to give you a literal answer. Remember after he showed us the limousine he strolled around the side of the house. He came in through the window, put on a false beard and the padded vest that Larry wore to conceal his weight loss, maybe helped Larry slide the body under the bed, and then went out the door to the car. He only had to mumble a few words, you'll remember. Once in the back of the car he shed the beard and padding, probably stuffing them in the glove compartment. When we searched for Tony, no one bothered to look in so small a place.

"Scoop climbed over the front seat and started to drive away. He was going to pick up Charlie Hello and be gone from the scene. Later you people would leave and maybe Larry would arrange to burn down this house before Tony's body could be found. But Charlie Hello spoiled the plan. He started shooting, blew out the tire on Scoop's car, and we quickly discovered that Tony Barrel had disappeared. Otherwise, instead of an impossible disappearance here we'd have had Tony disappearing fifty or a hundred miles away. Maybe the car would have gone off a bridge into the water. In any event Larry would be in the clear. Charlie was so doped up he might not have even noticed his boss wasn't in the back seat. If he did notice, Scoop probably could have convinced him he dropped Tony off somewhere."

"How'd you know all this?" Phil asked.

"When Tony climbed back into his car, I noticed that he didn't have the barrel-shaped diamond ring on his right hand. And though we all saw Tony get in, I hadn't seen Scoop come back to the car. With that smoked glass we couldn't tell if he was in there or not—but if he had been in there wouldn't he have gotten out and opened the door for his boss, as he did when they arrived? If the bearded man wasn't Tony it had to be Scoop, and if Tony hadn't left the bedroom his body must be still here. Under the bed was the logical place, and Larry was the logical killer. Everything else, including the motive, sort of flowed from that."

Phil looked down at the man on the bed. "You got anything to say, Larry?"

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"So I killed him! He's not the first person I killed. Let's just get out of here like I planned."

"What about the doc?"

"Kill him."

"And Scoop?"

"Him too."

"You tried that a few minutes ago," I pointed out. "Tried to kill the only witness to your crime. And next you'll have to kill Kitty and Phil and Marty, or the word will leak out and the mob will really be after you."

Suddenly Marty stepped to the window and rasped, "Car coming."

"That'll be the police," I said confidently, hoping I was right. "Someone must have heard the shooting and reported it."

Then Scoop broke free and lunged for the door. He was already outside when I heard Sheriff Lens bellow. I relaxed and smiled. Everything was all right . . .

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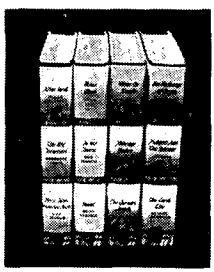

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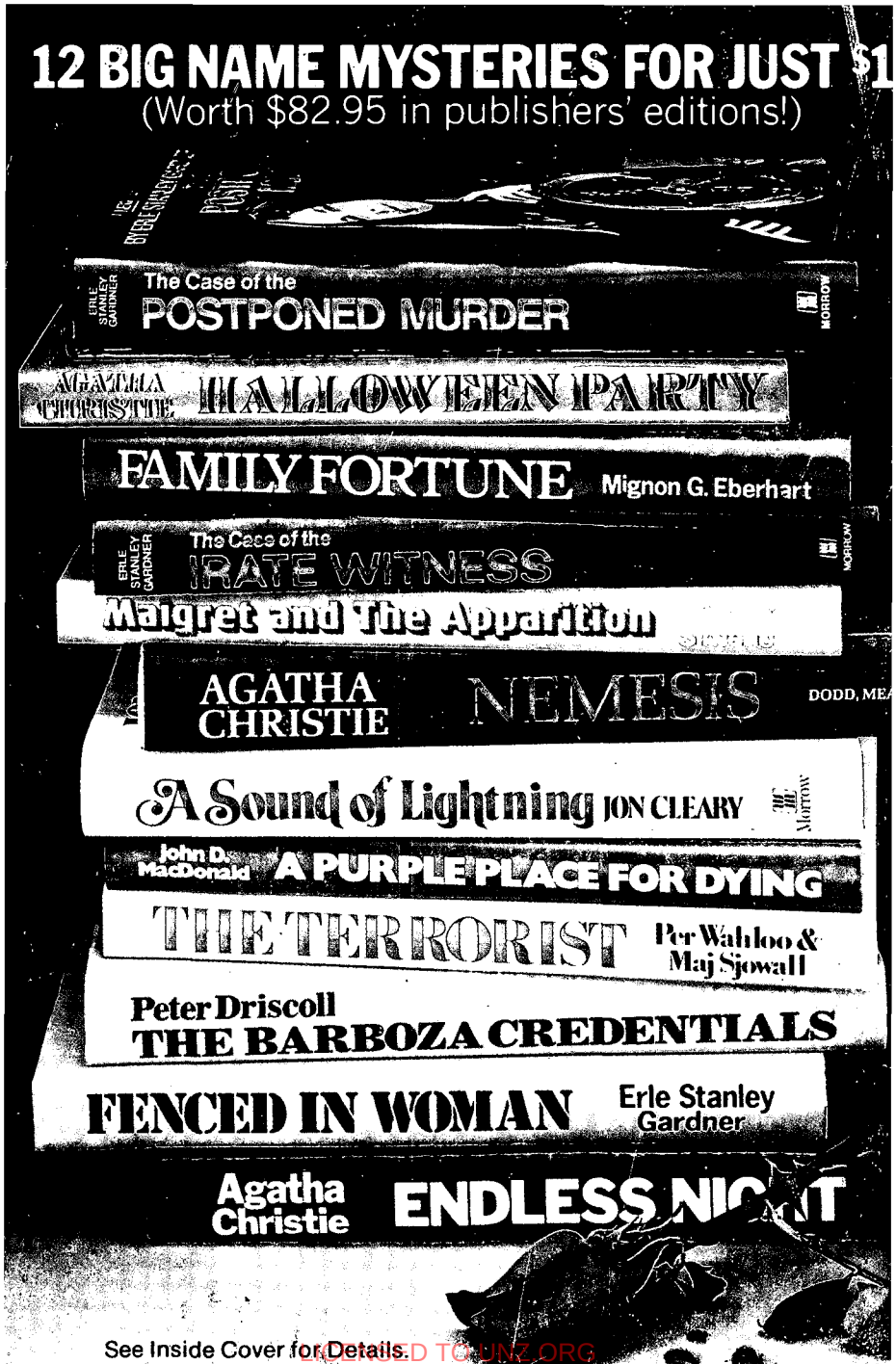

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